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Vol. XXVIII No. 5 Cover by Bryn Havord MAY 1967

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Acknowledgments are due for permission to reprint copyright material: to W. H. Allen for the Frank Harris extract; to The Cresset Press for the lines from " Collected Poems " by Frances Cornford; to Gollancz for the Elaine Dundy extract; to The Hogarth Press for " Difficulty with a Bouquet " from " The Stories of William Sansom "; to Hutchinson for the Mary Eden and Jerome K. Jerome extracts; to Methuen for the G. K. Chesterton extract from " Tremendous Trifles ", and for the E. V. Lucas extract; and to John Murray for the John Betjeman extract from " Chrysanthemums ". The Jack Cope story is from the author's collection " The Man Who Doubted", to be published by Heinemann.

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A Fleetway magazine

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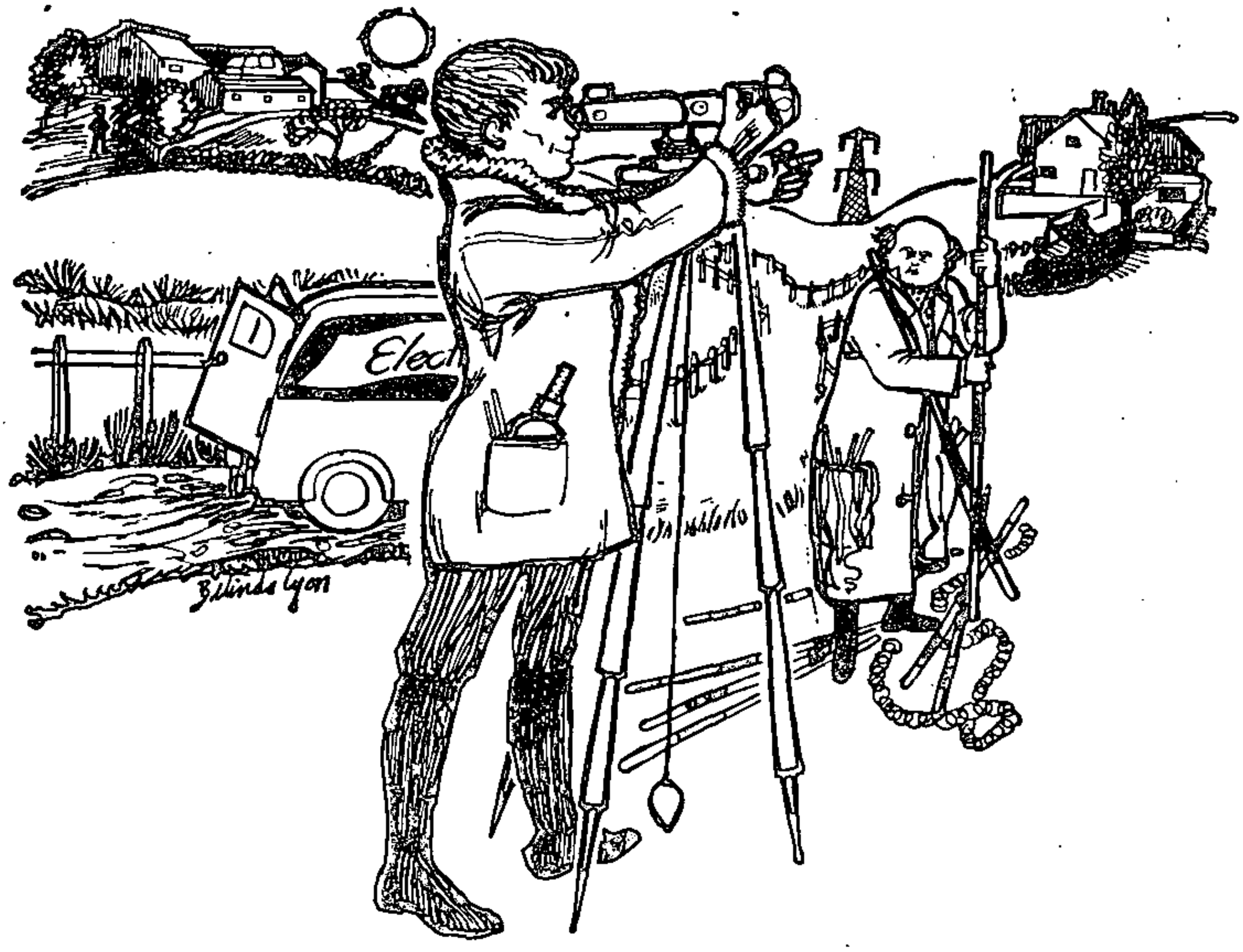
Gaeglers and the Pylons

BY WALTER MACKEN

GAEGLERS went into Miss Smith's this morning to buy his cigarettes and quarter pound of bullseyes. It was a pleasant autumnal morning. Miss Smith's was a thin three-storey edifice squeezed in between two supermarkets. It was an old-fashioned place. You had to step down inside the door and a bell rang when you opened it, and Miss Smith came out from another door which had a coloured cretonne curtain on it. She was a small woman of indeterminate age. She had been there as long as Gaeglers remembered. She could have got a big price for her shop from either of the supermarkets who were doing their best to wipe her out, but somehow she survived. It was only when you saw the determined chin that buttressed the small face that you realised why.

Her stocks were not big, but surprisingly comprehensive. Gaeglers could have got his cigarettes twopence cheaper and a halfpenny off the bullseyes at either of the supermarkets, but he admired Miss Smith's independence and gave her his support and encouraged his friends to do likewise. In fact it was like a cant in the town now: Don't let Gaeglers see you going into the supermarkets.

"Good morning, Gaeglers," she said, taking down the jar of bullseyes automatically, and taking out a handful and weighing them on her old-fashioned scales.



"Good morning, Miss Smith," he said. "You haven't retired yet?"

"I'll wait 'll after your funeral," she said.

Gaeglers laughed.

"That's good," he said, "at least there will be one mourner among the rejoicers."

She had left the door to her living place open after her. Gaeglers saw a young black-haired man sitting on a chair in front of the fire. He was holding a small girl between his knees. She was very active. He had a hard job restraining her. He nodded at Gaeglers and smiled. He was a nice-looking young man.

Miss Smith noticed this interplay.

"Ah," she said, "you don't know my nephew Tommy. Come on in and say hello to him. They are staying with me for a while."

He followed her in.

He shook hands with Tommy. He noticed that his hand was as hard as an oak board. He was introduced to the little girl, who smiled at him, showing him two teeth on top and two on the bottom. Gaeglers offered her a bullseye. Tommy laughed and Miss Smith snatched it from him. "The Lord save us," she said, "do you want to choke the poor thing to death? It's easy known

Gaeglers thought they were a very nice family

what a bachelor you are, Gaeglers, and how little you know about children."

The girl objected to being deprived of the sweet. She let out a few measured howls. This brought a young woman into the place, carrying a small fat baby on the crook of her arm. "Didn't I know I couldn't leave you with her," she said to Tommy.

Tommy winked at Gaeglers.

She shushed the child who put up a token resistance. Gaeglers was introduced to Tommy's wife Sheila and the baby boy, who just sucked his thumb and kicked his fat legs. Gaeglers thought they were a very nice family, but wondered where on earth Miss Smith put the lot of them in such a small house.

You'd have thought that Sheila had read his thoughts. "Aunt Fanny is awful good," she said. "I don't know how she puts up with us."

"You don't know the pleasure I get from young people in the house," Miss Smith said. "It'll make me live longer."

"Or die younger," said Tommy. "As soon as I get a job we'll look for a small house for ourselves."

Gaeglers looked at Tommy's sunburned face and hands.

"What kind of a job?" Gaeglers asked.

"Oh, anything," said Tommy. "In a factory."

"You'd look sweet in a factory," said Gaeglers. "Did you come from a farm?"

"See how he can tell," said Sheila.

"It's like me and the supermarkets," said Miss Smith. "He was squeezed out."

"They didn't squeeze you out," said Gaeglers.

"Tell him about it, Tommy," said Miss Smith.

"Why should we be putting our own load on another person's back?" asked Tommy.

"If you tell it often enough," she said, "you might find a solution."

"I don't believe in work myself," said Gaeglers. "There should be a law against it, but I know people who exploit that sort of thing and I might be able to put in a word for you."

Tommy laughed. "I don't want to work anywhere but outside," he said. "I had a small place, but it was too small, only six acres. We could barely scratch a living out of it. Then I heard of a new place of twelve acres, near the town. I could have made a good job of that, with vegetables and things. So I put my own small place up for auction. It was worth eight hundred. With that I would have borrowed another two hundred and bought this place, and we would have been in clover."

"So what happened? Don't tell me. Someone put the squeeze on you."

"Two of them," said Tommy. "The only men in the place with real money. One each side of me. They bid four hundred, and got it and divided it between them."

"Decent Christian gentlemen," said Gaeglers.

"They did nothing wrong," said Tommy. "It was a public auction. They were the only two bidders."

"You see," said Miss Smith. "And I thought it was only towns that had crooks in them. Never mind, you'll win out yet."

"It will take a long time working in a job in the town to get six hundred pounds together," said Tommy. "But some day we'll manage it."

"Is the twelve-acre place still available?" Gaeglers asked.

"It is," said Tommy, "but it won't be for long, I'm afraid. The man gave me three months. That's about two months ago."

"And you can't borrow the money?"

"Not that much," said Tommy. "You can't hock two nice babies and a pretty wife. That's all I have."

"I'm very interested in social history of this sort," said Gaeglers. "Could you and I go out to this place where you had your small farm and look it over? Maybe we'd think of something."

"There," said Miss Smith. "I knew Gaeglers would think of something."

"Don't jump the gun," said Gaeglers.

"I'll go with you all right," said Tommy, "but what good will it do?"

"God is good," said Gaeglers, piously.

"Now, Gaeglers," said Miss Smith warningly, "don't bring God into your scheming."

Gaeglers laughed.

They stood on a hill and looked down at this tidy valley. The sun was shining and it looked well. The fields were all gleaned of their harvest. Cattle grazed at the green after-grass. The valley was bisected by a small stream that gleamed in the sunshine. There were two gently rounded hills on each side of the river. They were both topped by houses. The one on this side was a two-storey house, plain and uncompromising, sheltered by a few trees. It was well-equipped with hay-sheds and out-offices. The one on the other hill was similar. It could have been a twin.

"Two fine fat farms," said Gaeglers.

"They are good places," said Tommy. "See down there near the stream? You can see what's left of our house. They have knocked it in already."

"No sentiment," said Gaeglers.

"They would have to pay rates on it if they left the roof on," said Tommy. "All the same, it's a bit sad. We had good times in that house. The children were born in it. A house without a roof is a lonely thing. It's full of memories, eh, but only for the people who lived in it."

"Why don't you curse these men?" Gaeglers asked.

Tommy laughed. "What good would that do?" he asked. "I admire them. They built up their farms by hard labour."

"You weren't the only one they bought out, were you?" Gaeglers asked.

"Oh, no," said Tommy. "The others wanted to sell too. They were emigrating. They hadn't their fathers' love of the land."

Gaeglers shaded his eyes looking down the valley into the glare of the sunshine. "What's that down there?" he asked.

Tommy looked. "Oh, that's a half-finished pylon," he said. "They are building a generating station on the coast and they are running pylons from it across the valley."

"Have they stopped work on them?" Gaeglers asked.

"Until the spring," said Tommy.

Gaeglers was silent.

"Have you seen enough now?" Tommy asked. "We better go back to the town. I get a bit sick looking at it all."

"The near man is Burke and the far man is Mahoney, right?"

"Yes," said Tommy. "Burke and Mahoney. It sounds like a limited liability company."

"Are they bright?" Gaeglers asked.

"They know there's two ha'pence in a penny," said Tommy. "They are very shrewd men."

"Highly intelligent?" asked Gaeglers.

"Well, they know cattle and crops and market prices," said Tommy, "but they wouldn't be able to explain Einstein's Theory. Neither would I."

"Fairly sure of themselves are they?" he asked.

"When they talk, men listen," said Tommy. "They can back their talk. Being successful gives them the feeling of power. They can say do this and it is done."

"Very interesting," said Gaeglers. "All that land the other side of the valley is bogland, isn't it?"

"It is," said Tommy. "Good deep bog too, sixty feet in places."

"Thanks for the geography," said Gaeglers. "We'll go now. There's a man I want to see."

"In a way, I'm sorry I came back to look at it," said Tommy wistfully.

"Maybe you won't be eventually. Come on," said Gaeglers.

Gaeglers found Tally at the dog track. He was down near the place where they kennelled the dogs. He was leaning on a rail. He was a butty man with a red face, and a long overcoat which brushed the ground. He had a fat pudgy face and a small nose under twinkling eyes.

Gaeglers hit him in the back. "Tally," he said, "I have been looking for you."

"Oh, no," said Tally. "Every time you look for me, I get into trouble and get very little money out of it. Look, Gaeglers, I'll tell you for free that the favourite in the next race is not going to win. Number Nine. Isn't that enough?"

"That's only an instalment," said Gaeglers. "Look, you and I are going on a trip to the country. You know? That's a place where they have cattle and things and trees and fields, and sheep dogs."

"Why are we going to do this?" Tally asked.

"We have a humanitarian mission," said Gaeglers.

"Oh, God," Tally groaned.

"For the trip," said Gaeglers, "we'll need a nice small van,

which you will paint a certain name on, we will also need those measuring tapes in leather cases, a few coloured poles, a few chains and a theodolite."

"Where do they grow them?" Tally asked.

"I'll send you a dictionary," said Gaeglers. "Now what's this you were saying about Number Nine being nobbled?"

In country places, even the ants have to go under the stones if they don't want to be seen. Nothing is private.

So it was no wonder that while Mr. Burke was eating his breakfast at the kitchen table he took keen note of the unusual activities in his half of the valley. He saw the van with the name of the electricity company painted on it coming into the rough dirt road below his hill. He watched the two men alight from it

Gaeglers' schemes always meant trouble for Tally

and then make their way across the fields, the smaller of the two loaded down with poles and other things. Mr. Burke nearly broke his neck craning it at the window to see their destination.

He wiped his mouth, then put on his hat and went outside the house where he could get a good look at them as he filled his pipe.

The small man with the long overcoat would walk away from the unfinished pylon with one of the coloured poles and hold it in a certain position, while the other man, obviously an official, wearing long leather boots and riding breeches, and a lamb-lined suède jacket, would peer through a sort of telescope affair and wave a hand one way or the other to the right or the left. The small man would then move the pole until the official was satisfied, and press it into the ground, go back, and pick up another pole, heft the telescope thing on his shoulder and walk off

ahead of the engineer. Mr. Burke knew he must be the engineer because the little fellow was doing all the work.

Mr. Burke was fascinated by all this. He was conscious of his filled haggards, his green fields, his grazing cattle. The harvest was over; it was successful, and he considered it only his due that people would put on a free show like this for him. There was a white-washed stone wall all around his house, and he leaned on this and watched. He noticed that they seemed to be heading directly for his house.

The line they followed came inexorably closer to him. He wondered what it was all about, but knew that if he waited patiently, he would soon know. He was a very patient man, not exactly complacent, but patient.

The engineer came close to him then. He was a handsome man, with a stern face. If Mr. Burke expected chit-chat from him, he was mistaken. The man just nodded his head politely and walked a few yards, looked around and beckoned imperiously to the little man. The little man loaded the telescope with its stand on his shoulder and came up the hill. He smiled at Mr. Burke in a friendly fashion, said, "Hello. Grand day, isn't it?" and went up to his master.

The master looked back at the poles they had erected. He shook his head. He indicated that he wanted the affair shifted to a different position. The little man did this, although he was sweating heavily and, Mr. Burke noted, didn't look at the engineer in too friendly a fashion.

The engineer looked through the thing again, shook his head, walked over to the gate in front of Mr. Burke's house, opened it, walked into the yard right in front of the house and beckoned his assistant to bring in the telescope affair.

This moved Mr. Burke to action.

"Here, what's all this?" he asked, coming away from the wall.

"Oh," said the engineer, "who are you?"

"I'm Michael Burke," he said, "and what right have you to trot into a man's front yard without a by-your-leave?"

"My name is Thomas Smith-Jones," he said. (Gaeglers had an exaggerated idea of the impression-value of double-barrelled names, but maybe he was right.)

He put his hand in his pocket and took out a book, and held it out to the well-fleshed man in front of him. "This is a copy of the Act that set up the Electricity Company," he said. "If you read Section 40a, Clause 965, Subsection 4b you will find that we have the right to go where we will in pursuit of our job."

"What would I be doing with a thing like that?" Mr. Burke

Walter Macken, who was born in the city of Galway in 1915 and is married with two sons, is well known in both the dramatic and literary worlds. From 1938 he worked as an actor-manager-producer for nine years with the Gaelic Galway Theatre, having learned his theatre craft there. In 1948 he joined the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, where two of his plays, *Mungo's Mansion* and *Home is the Hero*, were produced with great success. He has written plays in both English and Irish. He has acted in the West End and on Broadway and took a leading part in the film of Brendan Behan's *The Quare Fellow*. Social problems peculiar to Ireland, both contemporary and historical, figure significantly in the novels of Walter Macken.

asked. "Wouldn't I want a lawyer to read it? What does it mean?"

"Listen, you," said Gaeglers to Tally, "go and get me the chain." Tally trotted off. "It's very simple," said Gaeglers, peering again through the theodolite. "You see the pylons. There is only one way we can bring them—up this valley. We can't go through the bog. So I have lined the approach, and it looks very much to me as if one of them will have to be placed outside your front door."

"Are you mad?" asked Mr. Burke. "You can't do a thing like that."

"Read the Act," said Gaeglers.

"I don't care what the bloody Act says," shouted Mr. Burke. "Nobody is going to put a bloody pylon outside my door!"

Tally came back with the chain and handed it over to Gaeglers. Gaeglers solemnly took one end of it and started beating the ground around him with it and making notes in a little book. It just shows you! Gaeglers didn't know they had stopped using chains shortly after they built the Egyptian pyramids, but he had been taught about chains in school and Mr. Burke was impressed by the way he was walloping his front yard with it.

"But for the love of God, listen here," said Mr. Burke. "They can't do an inhuman thing like that. It's against the Constitution!"

"I'm only an official," said Gaeglers. "I just make a report. Take it up with the authorities."

"Authorities," said Mr. Burke bitterly. "By the time I got through to them they would have a whole generating station on my hill."

"There's a possibility," said Gaeglers, "that we might be able to shift it to the back of the house."

"But that's the haggard," said Mr. Burke. "How could I get in and out of my hay-shed and my stables?"

"We'll see," said Gaeglers, and this time he hefted the theodolite himself and walked towards the back of the house. Mr. Burke looked at Tally closely.

"There's no use looking at me," said Tally. "I only carry the tripod for him."

"He's serious?" Mr. Burke asked.

"Bejay, he is," said Tally. "The pylons must come up your hill or up the hill over there. Mahoney's hill is it?"

"That's right," said Mr. Burke. "Mahoney's hill it is. You mean if it doesn't come up my way, it will have to go up his way instead?"

"There are only two ways," said Tally. "It must be one of them."

"And they'll follow this Smith-Jones fellow's report?"

"A sound man," said Tally. "They never question him."

"Will you have a fill of tobacco," said Mr. Burke.

"I only smoke cigarettes," said Tally, innocently. It was very subtle but Mr. Burke understood and his face became cheerful. He put his hand in his pocket.

He took out a pound note.

"I don't have any cigarettes on me," he said, "but here's something to buy a few for yourself."

Tally's hesitation was masterly.

"Go on, man, what harm will it do? Wouldn't I give you a packet if I had them on me?"

Tally took the pound.

"Now," said Mr. Burke sitting back against the wall, "Tell me about Mr. Smith-Jones. He's an honest fellow, eh?"

"A saint," said Tally, "nearly."

"Ah," said Mr. Burke. "A hard-working conscientious fellow."

"If it wasn't for the ten children he has," said Tally, sighing.

"Ten," said Mr. Burke in amazement.

"He's a saint," said Tally. "He believes in big families."

"It must be awful hard to bring up ten these days," said Mr. Burke.

"It is," said Tally. "I know meself that he has to borrow the electricity van to bring them to the seaside on Sundays, in relays."

"Ah," said Mr. Burke, "so a little extra money wouldn't come astray then?"

"Is it Smith-Jones?" Tally asked. "He's fierce honest. He even pays for his own postage stamps."

"But children are expensive?" hinted Mr. Burke. "Clothes, food, education. Now, wouldn't it be a natural enough thing for him to build the pylons on Mahoney's hill? What's wrong with Mahoney's hill? In many ways isn't Mahoney's hill a better hill than mine?"

"If you want my opinion," said Tally, "I think it's a much better hill for pylons than this hill."

"Would you go and talk him out of it?" Mr. Burke asked.

"Is it me?" asked Tally wide-eyed.

"He's an honest man," said Mr. Burke. "Suppose he found the money on the ground under his nose?"

"How much money?" Tally asked.

"Say a hundred pounds," said Mr. Burke.

"Is it Mr. Smith-Jones and a hundred pounds?" He was horrified.

"Two hundred," said Mr. Burke, trying to think of Smith-Jones and to gauge his price.

"I'll see," said Tally, doubtfully. "Maybe I'll lose my job over this. Maybe he'll kill me."

"You just try it out," said Mr. Burke. "You never know."

He himself knew. Every man had his price. Tally walked away from him slowly, reluctantly. You couldn't fool Mr. Burke. He thought of a pylon rearing its bulk in his front yard or his back yard. He started to sweat. He took off his hat and wiped his forehead. He waited impatiently for Tally to return. It took a long time.

Mr. Burke was sweating in his clothes now. Tally finally came back, very slowly.

"I'm disappointed in Mr. Smith-Jones," he said.

"He wouldn't buy?" Mr. Burke asked in amazement.

"No, he will," said Tally, "but two hundred guineas."

"Guineas," said Mr. Burke, getting red in the face.

"Well, he's a professional man," said Tally shrugging.

"Wait here," said Mr. Burke, and he went into the house after his cash.

Mr. William Mahoney was likewise upset, and thought it would be a very good idea to run the pylons on Mr. Burke's hill. He was willing to pay for the privilege. Professional fees of course.

Gaeglers was in Miss Smith's back room, counting out the notes on the table.

Tommy and his wife and Miss Smith were looking goggle-eyed as the pile built up. Four hundred pounds.

"But how did you do it, Gaeglers?" asked Tommy when they had finished.

"Yes, how in the name of God?" asked Sheila. "I've known these two all my life and they wouldn't give a crust to their mothers."

"You want to have more faith in human nature," said Gaeglers. "You mustn't allow your experiences to embitter you. Let it be a lesson to you that in the hardest heart, there beats a love of fellow man."

"But how did you do it?" Miss Smith asked suspiciously, because she knew Gaeglers.

"I just went and talked to them. I spoke about the sad wife and the little helpless children. I talked of their duty to the State, and the fires of hell. I nearly had them crying, believe me. They didn't know they had done wrong, until I pointed it out to them. And then they responded with generous hearts."

"There's something awful wrong about your tale, Gaeglers," said Miss Smith.

"I'm surprised at a dear old lady like you," said Gaeglers.

"I don't know how he did it," said Sheila,"but I'm going to kiss him."

"Oh, no, you are not," said Gaeglers, rising and fleeing, and rather glad to get away from the eyes of Miss Smith, also resolving to avoid Tally for a few days, because Tally had been complaining of physical aches and pains and the amount of work he had to do while Gaeglers just strolled around like a double-barrelled idler.

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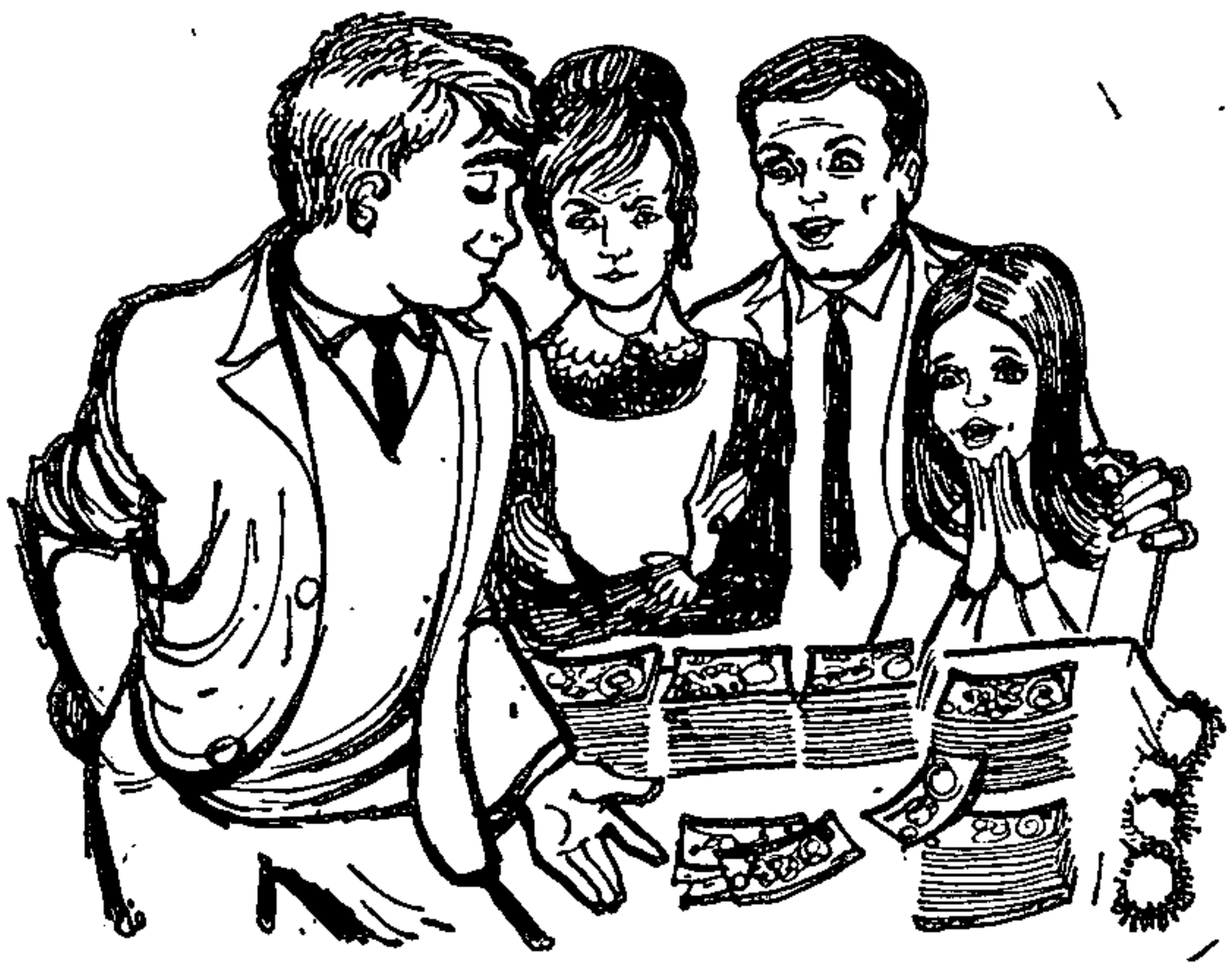

THERE ARE SAVAGE HEIGHTS, EAGER TO CLAIM LIVES, BUT THIS WAS DIFFERENT

Mountain Mercy

BY GABRIEL HYTHE

HE didn't begrudge the years he'd given to the mountain. Nor did he hold it against her that he was sometimes in danger of injury or death, high up there, remote from the little world of the valley.

He'd thought of the mountain as a woman since the only time in his life he'd visited Lima. There, in a museum, the truth was revealed when he stared at a statue. Two girls, city-smart, nudged each other and giggled. He knew they were regarding him as a simple young man from the country discovering what a woman was like underneath her clothes. He heard one of them whisper, "If he saw the real thing!"

Yet it was nothing like that. His attention was not captured by the long sweep of the thighs or the curved lines of breasts and shoulders. He was seeing that the mountain and the statue were of the same perfection, aspects of the same vision of pure beauty.

There was another truth, one he discovered slowly, as his experience lengthened. The mountain was like a beautiful woman in her power subtly to change her appearance so that every time one looked at her there was some new revelation. That this was due to fluctuations of the light, the amount of cloud in the sky, moisture in the air, was not a full explanation. There was something else which couldn't be analysed.

"Why don't you come down to earth, Pablo?" his brother often asked, with the mixture of superiority and impatience a

His legs dissolved under him and he was falling . . . falling

man of substance always feels towards poor relations. "There's still time for marriage, if you hurry. And it's never too late to make a bit of money. I can put you in touch with someone who has sheep to sell and won't ask too high a price. There's some good grazing going in the valley."

Juan himself had sheep, as well as some llamas. He was married to a woman whose face had become lined, whose body was starting to sag, and whose voice was strident from nagging. He had children: three sons and two daughters, who seemed to spend most of their time squabbling.

Pablo always shook his head. He liked the quietness of his hut and was always thankful to return to it after a duty visit to his brother's more impressive home. Most of all he liked the peace that the mountain gave so generously, the feeling of being as free as the condors which, their magnificent wings outspread, circled and glided majestically. Pablo believed he was closer in spirit to them than to his relations and the other people in the valley.

"And what will you do when you're too old for climbing?" Juan never failed to demand. "Squat outside your hut, begging, as anxious to talk about what you did when you were strong as to get a few cents to keep body and soul together?"

Pablo was secretly afraid of finishing up like that. His hope was that the mountain would be merciful and take him, take his life just as it had taken his heart. He tried not to think of it, though, and when the thought refused to be banished he told himself, "It will not be to the me of today that this will happen. The Pablo of tomorrow is a different person. Why should I burden myself with his sorrows? Anyway, if he's at all like me, he'll be content to look at the mountain. Just to look and remember."

He lived very simply except for the odd times when he was invited to dine with his brother. Juan, he suspected, always told his wife to make a special effort so that the foolish Pablo could taste what good living was like. Usually the main dish was *arróz con pato*, with spices added to the rice and duckling.

Pablo never failed to suffer from indigestion afterwards.

Of course, a little money was necessary, even for what Juan would regard as a grimly frugal diet. Pablo earned enough for his needs by acting as a guide. True, the mountain was not in the same class as Huascaran or Yerupaja, which were among the giants of the Andes; but it was a climb of medium difficulty with a magnificent view from the eyrie of its summit. Foreign visitors were rare and most of the climbers came from the copper mines in the next valley. Some were students obtaining a little practical knowledge while taking a mining degree, or they came

as members of the mining company's own training scheme. But there were miners as well. Perhaps they did it because there was little enough to occupy the leisure hours. Or perhaps there was a deeper need; like Sanchez, who was older than Pablo.

Sanchez had said once, "I think we see too much of the earth, working in the mines. It is good to go up into the sky."

Pablo had gripped his hand impulsively, and in that moment they were as close as brothers. Closer, perhaps. There was something Pablo could share with Sanchez, while there was nothing he could share with Juan.

It was not always that Pablo's services were required. There were regular climbers who felt they had sufficient experience to manage without one. And occasionally there were youngsters who were sure they could reach the summit unaided and who certainly didn't want one of the older generation telling them to do this and not to do that.

So it happened, now and again, that a small party of climbers failed to return on time and it was necessary to go up and rescue them. Then there would be an urgent call for Pablo, who, very deliberately, put on his heavy boots, slung a coil of rope over one shoulder and a light bag of first-aid equipment over the other, then finally picked up his stout spiked stick. And with the same deliberation he would set off up the mountain.

So far, there had never been a tragedy. Most people said it was because Pablo was excellent at rescue work. Pablo knew it was because the mountain was kind. There were savage mountains, eager to claim a few lives; but this one was different. Only, like any beautiful woman, she was a little capricious; there were days when it was unwise to intrude upon her privacy.

"You're a fool—going up there to rescue other fools," Juan said angrily. "One of these days . . ."

Pablo shook his head. "The mountain won't harm me."

"You're like a man who's played with a baby puma and doesn't realise it's grown into a wild and dangerous animal," Juan retorted in disgust.

It was still raining heavily the morning they sent from the mine to tell Pablo that three young climbers who had set out on the previous day were even now somewhere up the mountain.

One of the messengers was Sanchez. "I'll come with you," he offered.

In the cold grey light of the morning he looked an old man. Rain trickling down his lined face had formed dew on his drooping grey moustache. He had driven the Jeep along the rough

track which linked the two valleys and he was rubbing his gnarled hands as though gripping the wheel had cramped them. And he was breathing heavily after the climb to Pablo's hut from the spot where they had had to leave the vehicle.

He didn't look strong enough to take part in a mountain rescue, but Pablo nodded. Up there, strength was not everything; experience and a cool head were more important.

Pablo dropped into a chair, removed his slippers, and pulled on his boots. "Who's lost?" he asked.

It was the other man from the mine who answered. His expression and the tone of his voice suggested he resented this occurrence which had broken into the normal routine of a working day. "Alvear, Videla, and Mernes," he said. "All from Cuzco University."

He resented that, too.

"Alvear was the leader," Sanchez said. "They were not going to the summit—only to the top of the East Ridge."

Pablo must have seen them the previous afternoon. Three small specks moving slowly along the cat-walk of a narrow rim. A bad place because there was a sheer drop to scree below, a mass of boulders and broken rock so loose that anyone falling on it might start a stone avalanche. Pablo had watched anxiously, noticing the looming clouds. The rain they had been threatened with had started within the hour and visibility had misted out.

Conditions were still much the same.

"Alvear," he said gloomily. A veteran of three climbs and only one of those to the summit! Pablo had no recollection of Videla and Mernes.

"What do you think?" Sanchez asked.

Pablo shrugged his shoulders. If the young men had any prudence they'd have considered a return along that rim too dangerous in the rain. Where it fused into the main mass of the mountain there was a crevice which offered shelter. They were probably huddled there, chilled to the bone and swearing they'd never go mountaineering again.

He fastened his boots and went across to the stove. It would be as well to take a flask of well-sweetened coffee. While he was waiting he took down a coil of rope from a peg and also the bag with the first-aid equipment.

"I can carry that," Sanchez offered. "You have the rope."

The other man, whose name was Garces, said with obvious reluctance, "If you need me . . ."

Pablo shook his head. An unwilling man was a poor climbing

companion as well as an insult to the mountain. Only those who love her should invade her isolation.

When the coffee was ready Pablo filled the flask. There was sufficient left over for three cups. Sanchez was glad of his. Garces only took one out of politeness and as he drank he complained, "There should be better rescue arrangements."

"Who would pay?" Pablo asked.

Sanchez sighed. "Not the mining company. There were many eager to join a rescue party, but the manager wouldn't hear of it. He said they were employed to mine copper, not to climb mountains; Alvear and his companions had only themselves to blame if they were in trouble. He made it seem the company was being very generous in sending the two of us to ask for your help."

Garces said, "Suppose, when you get up there, you find all three injured. What then?"

Pablo replied patiently, "I shall have to come back for more help. Unless the rain stops nobody will be able to see us up there. As for the injured, we'll make them as comfortable as we can and Sanchez will stay with them."

He supposed that was how it would be. The truth was there had never been a bad accident and he'd always managed a rescue alone or with one companion.

Sanchez finished his coffee. "We'll get them down." He glanced at Pablo as if for confirmation, but Pablo said nothing. He was wishing Garces had kept silence. It was a bad thing to talk of disaster; it created a vague uneasiness.

The first part of the climb was easy, though the relentless rain made it unpleasant. Pablo went first, setting what an inexperienced observer might have thought a slow pace; but it was a steady one which could be kept up for hours. Going up the mountain was like an ascent into nowhere, because the summit was completely hidden by cloud and so was the flat top of the East Ridge. Even the narrow rim which was their objective was no more than a vague darkening of the mist.

They came to the first *couloir*, a long furrow cut into the mountain-side. The gradient was steep but not as vertical as a chimney and there was a small torrent of rushing water. Pablo could hear Sanchez breathing heavily and so, for his sake, suggested a rest when they reached a narrow ledge at the top of the *couloir*.

As soon as he had recovered some of his breath Sanchez said, "Garces was glad you didn't need him. He knows a girl in the

valley, Jorge Montero's daughter, and was eager to slip off and see her."

Pablo knew the Montero family, of course. Jorge, like Juan, herded sheep. He didn't know about Garces and the daughter, though. This was not surprising; Pablo kept himself to himself and because he preferred to live that way he was never curious about other people. Even when he dined with Juan, and his sister-in-law gossiped about everybody, Pablo never listened properly.

Things he did happen to hear he promptly forgot.

Sanchez said, "I suppose it will take us an hour to reach the rim."

"About that," Pablo agreed. "Are you ready?"

The way was so familiar to Pablo that he could have managed it with his eyes closed. His hands and feet went instinctively to the best holds. There was no need of *pitons*; they were only necessary when climbing to the summit on the difficult North Face. And yet, Pablo thought, when this was over Juan would grumble at him again for risking his life. The fact was, though, it was safer up here than in the streets of Lima or Cuzco, where you were always having to dodge cars. His only concern was in respect of Sanchez, who very easily became short of breath. Because of this they had to rest several times, but never for very long.

The rain was still falling and the sky was as overcast as ever. Nowhere was there a promise of blue, a sign of a break in the clouds.

They came to the rim. Sanchez looked at his watch. "An hour —exactly!"

Pablo smiled. He didn't spoil Sanchez's pleasure by saying that, alone, he could have done it in forty-five minutes. There was no sign of the three climbers they were seeking; but that wasn't surprising if they were sheltering in the crevice. And why shouldn't they be? It was the most sensible place.

The inner side of the rim was like a segment of a bowl, almost a semi-circle. There was a smooth drop to the mass of boulders and smaller debris of the scree. This in turn sloped down to form the insecure wall of a ravine. The outer side of the rim was very different: sheer, with great bastions of rock. The Cat-walk was narrow, rarely more than two feet across, in the worst places only a matter of inches. Erosion had smoothed it and now it was. wet and slippery.

Pablo unslung the rope from his shoulders. He gave it two turns round his waist and after paying out a few feet passed the

remainder to Sanchez, who secured himself and placed the balance of the coil round his own shoulders. To compensate for the additional weight he gave the first-aid bag to Pablo.

"Ready?" Pablo asked, gripping his thick stick.

"Ready," Sanchez answered.

Pablo started to move out. It was like walking a plank somewhere up in space, because the visibility was so bad that everything ahead and everything below seemed to lose solidity in the haze.

He paused to test each foothold, but this gave deliberation rather than hesitation to his progress.

They were on one of the parts of the mountain which had to be treated with respect. He had no awareness of great danger, though, for he must have made this rim passage hundreds of times. Neither was he very anxious about Sanchez, who was certainly no novice; but he *was* a little concerned regarding the laboured breathing of his companion. It meant Sanchez was getting too old for this sort of climb and it was even a warning that time was running out for himself, too. Only a week ago Juan had said bitingly, "Why keep fooling yourself that you're like a mountain deer? You're not old so long as you're down here in the valley; but you are once you're up there. Past it. That's what you should realise. The first moment of weakness and it will be the end. The mountain will get you."

Pablo didn't believe that; but he knew he was always more tired after a climb than he used to be. He was even a little out of breath sometimes, particularly up on the testing North Face; though he knew his breathing was never so bad as that of poor Sanchez.

"You all right?" Pablo called.

"I'm fine." Sanchez had to stop in order to speak, and the words were gasped.

Pablo pretended the Cat-walk was more slippery and several times he stopped quite unnecessarily to probe with his stick at some of the cracks. Because of the slowing-down, with the rain falling all the time, he began to feel cold. He was thankful when, at last, they were across the rim. It narrowed, like a wedge driven into the mountain, and as Pablo reached the firmer footing between two stumpy bastions, he braced himself and hauled on the rope to help Sanchez climb up beside him.

They crouched, sheltering as much as they could from the driving rain.

"Will it never stop?" Sanchez panted. There was still no break in the cloud cover.

"It will still be raining when we get back," Pablo forecast. And after they'd rested for about five minutes he added, "And the quicker we can start the better."

He climbed a little higher, towards the crevice. Then he cupped his hands to his mouth and called.

There was an immediate response, not only vocal but of waving arms. The three young climbers emerged from their uncomfortable shelter and Pablo grunted his satisfaction. It was going to be an easy rescue after all. No-one was hurt and Garces was a pessimist!

"Can you see them?" That was Sanchez, who was too low down to be able to see.

"They'll be with us in a few minutes," Pablo told him.

Sanchez, who was devout, quietly thanked his favourite saint; but Pablo smiled up towards the hidden summit of the mountain. It was a slightly nervous smile because he was guiltily aware of having, for a few moments, doubted her benign nature. He should never have listened to Garces, who was just as wrong as Juan.

He stretched out to help each of the three climbers in turn. They looked miserably cold and their eyes had that staring expression which is the legacy of an ordeal. Their joy at being rescued was mingled with a certain sheepishness. Pablo chuckled softly. They reminded him of boys who had been caught smoking.

Alvear, their leader, who was now very subdued, said apologetically, "We started back along the rim, but the rain was in our faces, blinding us. Then I slipped and nearly fell. That decided us it wasn't safe, so we made our way back and tried to shelter up there."

He pointed to the crevice.

"Only sensible," Pablo said.

There was very little space for the five of them to squeeze between the two rock bastions and Pablo had to be very careful as he poured coffee into the top of the flask. Alvear started to thank him for the rescue, struggling with the inadequacy of words, but Pablo said, "Be quiet—drink this."

Pablo gave them all coffee in turn, but there was not so much for Sanchez and only a few sips for himself—though it was sufficient to give him a comforting sensation of warmth trickling all the way down to his stomach.

"Now let's get back," he said cheerfully.

Even more difficult than the pouring of coffee in the cramped space was the task of roping everybody; but at last it was done

and Pablo climbed down carefully to the narrow beginning of the Cat-walk.

"Keep your eyes on me," he instructed Alvear, who was second in line. "Take it steady."

Sanchez was the last man. They moved out along the rim, the five of them, linked by rope.

"It's quite easy," Pablo called back encouragingly. It was, provided you were careful and that you kept your nerve. He'd have been happier going faster; but the three climbers they had rescued were very stiff after spending a cold, wet night huddled uncomfortably in the crevice. They hobbled like old men with rheumatism. So Pablo had to go slowly; so slowly that it seemed the passage of the ridge would take all day. He began to think the distance to be covered would never decrease, that for every yard that they progressed another was added to the end of the rim.

It was not so bad once they'd passed the halfway spot; but Pablo's impatience increased. He was feeling tired, very tired. He couldn't remember a time when, scaling the mountain, he'd been afflicted by anything like such a weariness. Deliberately, he thought of Juan and how Juan would say triumphantly, "What did I tell you? You're past it. The time's come for you to give up this foolishness and settle down. Live sensibly, like the rest of us."

He could hear the words and they acted as a spur. He'd show Juan; he'd show them all.

And now there was only the last quarter of the rim left. Pablo fought down the insistent desire to rest. That was impossible here, anyway.

As soon as they were off the rim there'd be no more difficulty. They could unrope and take it easy.

"Not far now," he said. "Nearly there." It was as much to encourage himself as the others.

A few yards, that was all. The Cat-walk was wider from now on and all the bad places were behind them. A few more steps and then . . .

Suddenly, without warning, it happened. A stabbing pain, like a dagger plunging into his heart. Darkness, as if night had dropped its curtain. His legs seemed to dissolve under him and then he was falling . . . falling . . . There were vague shouts, a long distance away; a pull at his waist. Then the breath was knocked out of him and there was pain of a thousand blows as he hit the loose mass of the scree.

And the blackness deepened.

It was a slow, painful awakening. At first Pablo was only aware of pain. Pain all over his body, but mostly from what had seemed a stab. His left ankle, too; that seemed to be on fire. Then, his brain working very slowly, he realised what had happened. He'd fallen from the rim; not much of a fall because at this point the scree came high up the side.

The others! What had happened to the others? It hurt to move but somehow he managed it and looked up. All this had appeared to take a long time, but it could only have been a matter of seconds because he could see Alvear being hauled up to safety. There was a knife in his hand and he'd cut the rope. The others were safe.

Pablo breathed a little thanksgiving. He watched Alvear gain the rim. Then all four reached the end of it and Sanchez was looking down, hands cupped to mouth.

"Pablo!"

Pablo managed to raise an arm and give a feeble wave.

"I'm coming down to you!" Sanchez shouted.

Pablo eased his position, very carefully for fear of starting an avalanche of stones which would destroy him. Some of the chunks of rock were pressing into him uncomfortably. He began, cautiously, to shift them. They were only small pieces, easy to hold in the hand. One was considerably heavier than the others, though no larger. Pablo looked at it.

There was a slight clatter as Sanchez, lowered on the rope, reached the scree. He approached Pablo with great care.

"Are you badly hurt?"

Pablo shook his head. "My ankle—but I don't think it's broken."

"Soon have you out of here. What happened?"

"It wasn't the mountain's fault," Pablo replied. "I had a pain and passed out." He didn't say more than that, but he knew. It was his heart. No more than a threat, this time; but he was well aware of what the doctor would say.

"You must take life easy from now on. No more climbing for you."

He would have to be content with sitting outside his hut, looking at the beauty of the mountain. Well, he'd had his good times; there was plenty to remember. And the mountain had been good to him. Always. Even now.

As Sanchez roped him, in preparation for carrying him up, Pablo still held on to the heavy piece of rock. The mountain's farewell gift. He knew a gold nugget when he saw it.

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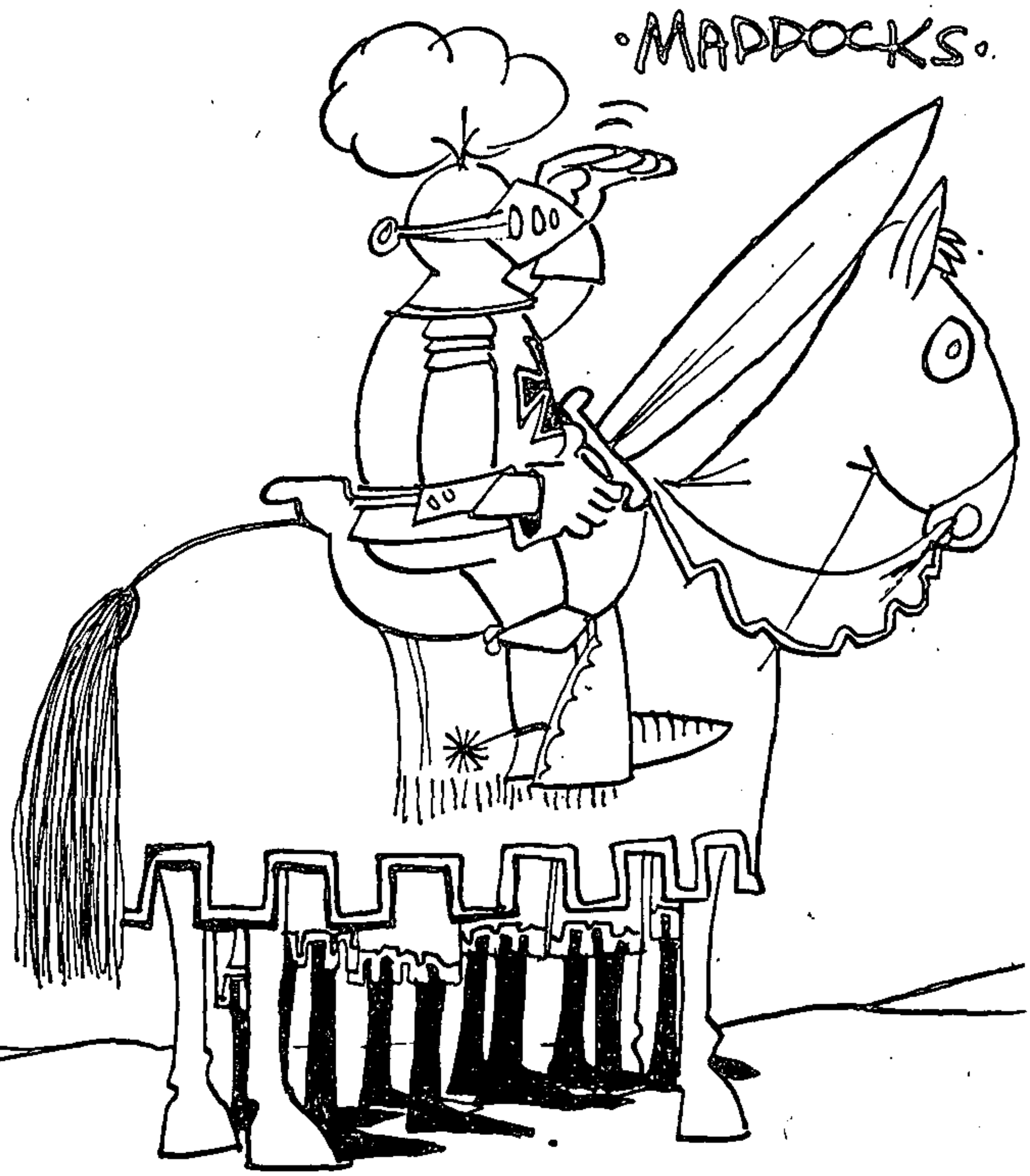
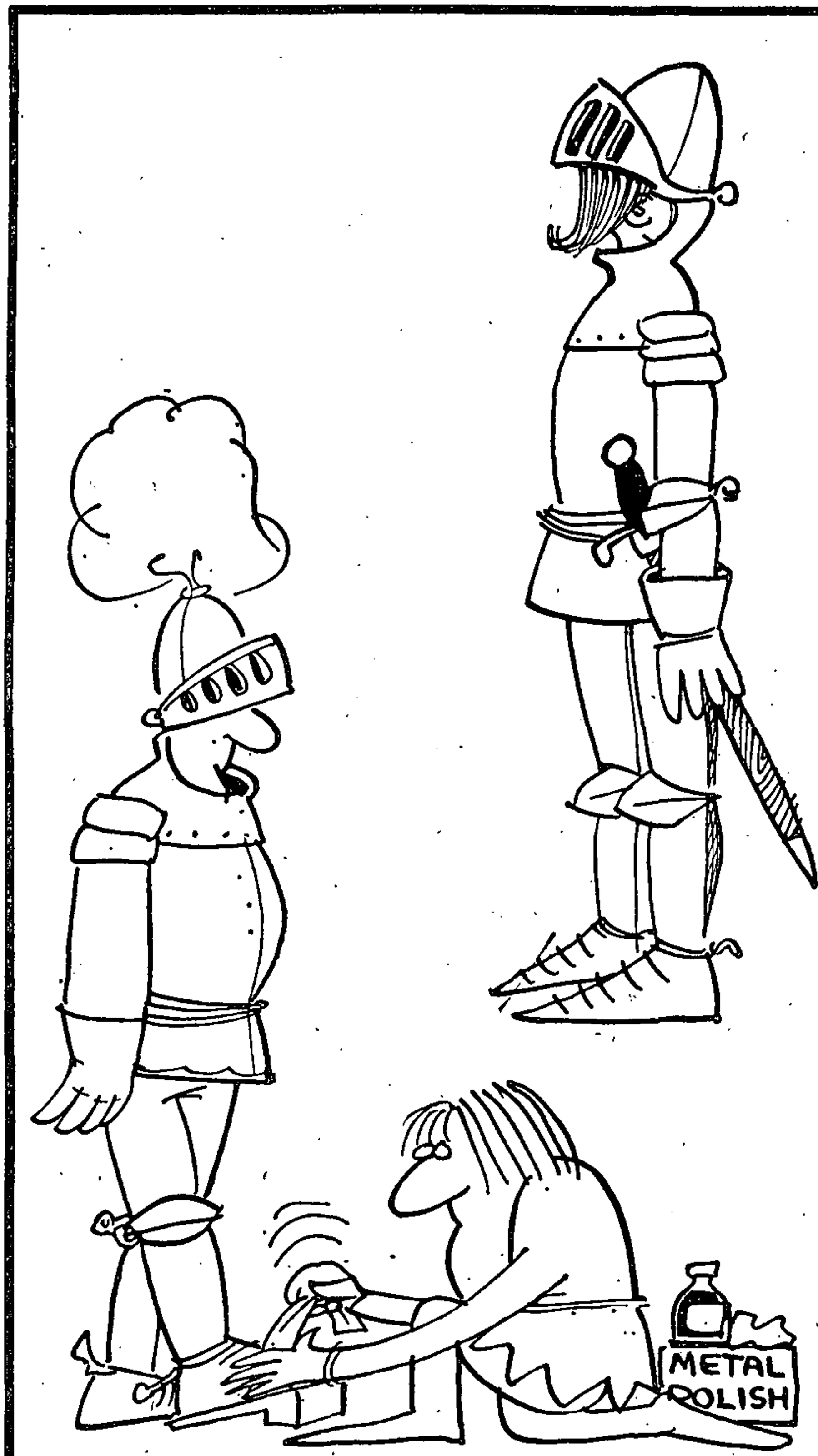
Knights Errant

Medieval mayhem

as imagined by

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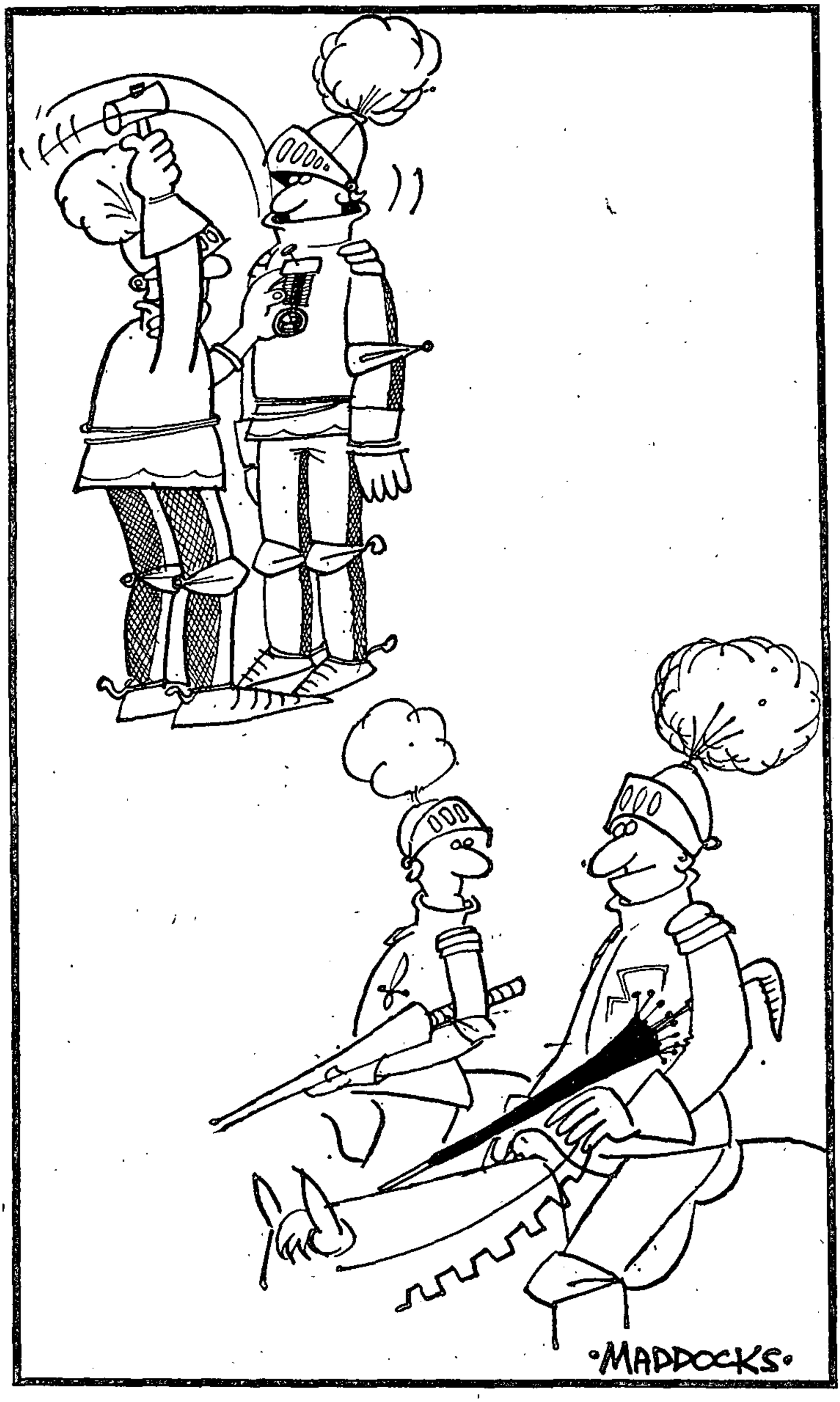
MADDOCKS

A name new to Argosy . . . and a story that, with its feeling for the countryside and subtle perception of human relationships, has echoes of D. H. Lawrence

The Lady & the Snare

BY DIANA WINSOR

THE village had grown beside the river in a deep Somerset valley. At dusk it drew from the high fields all the gilded colours of the sunset, and drowned them in its shadow.

The village rat catcher, Charlie, was on his way home to tea. He was a thin, clean man with pale grey eyes and a rare smile. A few children tried to hate him for the times they found hares caught in his traps, but they could not. Perhaps the secret of his charm was in the contradiction of his clean and modest self and the dark deeds he performed. Seeing him, no-one could believe that his daily work involved poison, snares, choking foxes in gas-filled earths.

He was going home to his brothers and his mother, as he had from his rat catching for eleven years. Though the eldest son, he was the smallest and the thinnest. Yet of his two brothers he loved best the tallest and most handsome—Michael, the youngest. Thinking of Michael, and home, and warmth, Charlie hurried through the rising river mist towards home.

The rat catcher heard the car slow up behind him and turned, squinting into the headlights. It drew beside him, stopping, and out of the shine in his eyes he saw a woman's face, bright eyes, shrouded in fur.

"Excuse me," she said, so low that he bent his head to hear her and smelt her artificial scent. "Could you tell me if there is a hotel or a pub here, where I could stay for a while?"

"There's The Fox and Badger just down the road on the right. It be clean."

She let in the clutch and left him with a quick smile. He

watched the car glide down the hill, until its brake lights glowed outside The Fox and Badger inn, and went into his own house.

" 'Evening, Charlie," his brother Michael said when he entered. "Did you catch old Tom's fox that was stealing his chickens?"

"Aye," said the rat catcher, scrubbing his hands at the sink.

"You should have a terrier, you know, Charlie," Michael said.

"There's ways better than dogs, for killing rats," said Charlie.

"Let him eat, Michael," their mother said.

She was a thin woman like the rat catcher in looks. She could not rest her long red fingers, but was for ever setting things to right, twitching and straightening this and that. Because only Charlie was like her, and her other two sons, Michael and Thomas, were like her husband, she loved Charlie best.

She knew what they said of her husband in the village. "He went to Taunton one day," they said, "and that was the last she saw of him. And not surprising, neither."

"Was it a woman?" some asked.

"Aye. A Devon woman."

But it was conjecture, for Mrs. Chalice had never told anyone except her eldest sons what had happened. She would not tell Michael until he was twenty-one, and ask as he might of Charlie and Thomas they would say nothing.

Thomas was a quiet man who went his own way, and it was natural, therefore, that Charlie and Michael should be the closest. Michael was a cowman, a tall, broad-shouldered man of almost twenty-one, with black, arched brows above dark eyes, and a gay bony face. He was taller than Charlie by some five inches, and yet he never ceased to respect the rat catcher, and to love him. And other ways in which they differed were slow to show, for Michael saw no differences and Charlie wanted to see none.

They had finished tea that evening and Thomas had gone out when there was a knock at the door, a double knock, at which Michael looked idly up and called to the visitor to enter. Mrs. Chalice did not look up, but rattled the dishes in the sink, and Charlie whistled as he cleaned his gun.

It was a girl from the village, Michael's girl, Susanna. She was accustomed to the Chalices' home and, big and brown like a new chestnut, she went to Michael and kissed his black hair. They had promised to marry almost two years ago, and Susanna's impatience was quickening. But when she showed it, Michael would smile his slow smile and caress her features with a tender hand, quietening her, because he was in no haste to

marry. "Why, Charlie is not wed yet," he would say, "and he is nearly one and thirty."

"Aye, and Charlie never will be wed," said Susanna sharply, and would have to take back her words at Michael's frown.

Now Susanna took a cloth to dry the dishes, and began to talk into the quiet. She always did so, needing no answer, but when she said, "there's a woman staying at The Fox and Badger," Charlie glanced at her.

"A woman?"

"Aye, a woman, Charlie," Susanna said to him. "There's many about . . . I saw her going in from my window, furs and all, and just a little suitcase. Funny, that, I said to myself, because it was a great car, and she must have money." Susanna surveyed with gratification the listening brothers. "Aye, and she had a little rich kind of dog and all—a beautiful little creature, Michael, like a tiny greyhound, but as small as a terrier almost and prettier for sure. You would not have liked it, Charlie, but Michael would."

"No, daresay I would not have," said Charlie.

"Queer, a woman staying here though," said Michael. "And what was she, Susanna? Old or young, plain or fair?"

"Oh—she was young," said Susanna. "Plain or fair, I couldn't tell, in the dusk as it was."

"Strange, though," said Michael.

"Strange, indeed," said Mrs. Chalice, and the dishes clattered under her hands.

Late that night, when Susanna had gone home and Mrs. Chalice gone to bed, Michael said, "Mother was angry when she heard of the woman at The Fox and Badger. It be women that put her in such moods, every time. It is because of what Father did, is it not, Charlie? Ran off with a woman, I reckon."

"What do you know of it?" said the rat catcher softly.

"Why, nothing, but it must have been that."

Charlie looked into the rustling fire. He smiled, remembering. "Aye, it was a woman. A big Devon woman with white arms and a laugh you could hear half across the valley. She was like a big white gull. Mother does not know it, but I saw them."

"It was just that, then? He ran off with another woman?"

"There was no 'just'," said Charlie.

"No," said Michael. After a while he said, "Why have you told me this now, Charlie?"

"Because you should know, now," said Charlie.

Michael looked at his brother, puzzled, and the lick of the flames rippled on his hair and gleamed on his cheek bones.

The woman at The Fox and Badger had taken a room for one week, as the landlord informed the curious. She was, he had deduced, a relative of the eccentric family of Dovetons who had once lived in the next valley, for it was no common name, and though she wore a wedding band she had signed the register as Miss Maria Doveton.

Each day she and the dog went out to walk or to paint in the countryside. Her dog was an Italian greyhound, delicately arched, huge-eyed in a fragile head. It seemed born to move in a gracious ritual, treading in a fold of silk, and like its mistress was a strange creature in that village. And at the end of the week the woman took her room for a further week.

"She had eyes truly of apple-colour," said Michael into the fire.

"How do you know the colour of her eyes?" asked Charlie.

"Everyone knows. They are beautiful eyes, Charlie. Why is it only you have not noticed?"

"Why must you notice, Michael?" asked Susanna, at his feet. The dark eyes that she had seen tender and drowsed glanced down at her, amused.

Mrs. Chalice was darning. Watching the brothers and Susanna, she pricked herself with her darting needle.

In the grey early morning of the next day, the rat catcher went through the village to begin his work by visiting his snares in the high fields. As he went past the inn he saw the little Italian dog, playing in the leaves, and he was not far by when the woman came out and called good morning to him. He hesitated to walk on. She was wearing trousers and a dark green jersey, pale hair drawn back at her nape. She drew closer to him, and he saw that her eyes were indeed the green of apples.

He greeted her in return, and found that they were walking together down the silent street.

"I believe it was you who recommended I stay at The Fox and Badger," she was saying. "I remember you, that night I came."

"Aye, I remember you," said Charlie.

"Do you? Well, I suppose any stranger is noticeable here."

"No, I recall your face," said Charlie. "But I have not seen you since."

"Well, are you going my way now? I'm going up to the woods for a walk."

"Yes, I am going to see to my snares. I am a rat catcher."

"Indeed," she said.

The rat catcher and Miss Doveton went slowly down the lane and took the damp track up the hill and out of the valley, up

to where the woods spilled bare winter brown over the ridge. When the sun gleamed through the mist the wet boughs glistened, as though the whole wood was made of a girl's hair. Charlie loved the woods, the quiet and the wet of them, and especially he worked and wandered in them in the winter. In the summer he was afraid of coming upon lovers in the grass.

Miss Maria Doveton followed in the rat catcher's wake, holding her little dog in her arms, while its velvet-skinned body quivered at the scents all about it. Once, the woman slipped. Charlie turned and she reached out to grasp his hand. Her fingers were so small, so small within his own that it was surprising and pleasing, for his hands were neat like an animal's paws. He gave his quick and sweet smile and she laughed back at him.

In the second of Charlie's snares was a hare, lying hard down in the long grass.

"Oh look, it is afraid," said the woman.

Her little dog shivered, smelling the fear. It yapped, suddenly, as Charlie bent to free the hare.

"Quiet the dog," said Charlie.

The woman knelt down beside him, one hand on the dog's neck to calm it. "Hush," she whispered.

Charlie put his hands gently on the hare, so that its crouching body moved involuntarily and its eyes rolled in fear. Then, in that climax of panic, it was lifted; Charlie's hand went sideways sharply on to its neck, and it died, its neck broken. Charlie tied the hare at the hind feet and rose. He put out a hand and drew the woman up beside him.

He was taller than she, and stood still for a while as he looked down at the rise of her hair from her forehead, the brightness of her green eyes, the outward curl of her lower lip. The sun came wandering through the trees and webbed them round in its pale strands, while the little dog yelped in jealous anger because it was ignored.

"Come, perhaps there are other hares still to find," the woman said softly.

The rat catcher was late for tea that evening, though for no real reason but that he had lingered on his way home from the high fields and farms, going the long way through the woods and smiling to himself over his secret thoughts. When he entered his home Mrs. Chalice, pouring tea, looked at him curiously. She was uneasy. "Why are you late?" she asked him.

"I was on the high farms and came back by the snares in the woods." Charlie touched her, fondly, as he went to his place

after scrubbing his hands. "I'm sorry I worried you, Mother."

Michael had said nothing, and before Charlie was finished rose from his place. He went to his coat behind the door and put it on with a remote deliberation that made the action more unfamiliar than it might have been; as if he had departed.

"Michael—where are you going?" said Mrs. Chalice, folding and pleating her apron in her hands.

Michael turned his dark eyes in surprise, his brows arched high in polite inquiry. "Why, out, Mother. Does it trouble you, then, Mother, if I go out on my own business?"

"No, but surely you can be saying where—?"

"Good night, Mother. Charlie—will I see you tonight, for a glass, if I am not too late and you not gone to bed?" His mouth softened as he looked at his brother. He was not as sure of himself as he appeared, and Charlie, seeing it, put a quieting hand on his mother's.

"Aye, Michael, I may see you tonight. Now, Mother, let him go his own ways."

Michael smiled in quick gratitude, and closed the door behind him. Mrs. Chalice began to clear the table, though Charlie had not finished.

"Why is it," she said, clattering the dishes, "that your brother must grow so like his father? Do you know there is talk in the village? Talk of him and that woman—green eyes, like a cat, they say. Where is he going now, I ask? Where is there, but the inn, or the fields in the dark? And you know who is at the inn, sometimes drinking there, they say, with the men, and her little dog yapping at her feet like a demon creature."

"Mother, be silent," Charlie said.

"Aye, that is what I am told, now, in my own house. It is she who's caused it. Michael is mad on her. Like *he* was mad, he that went off with his leman and left us, Charlie. It was a witch that took him, a witch off the moors, and now it is another."

"Michael has Susanna," said Charlie.

"Oh, but then ask Susanna if she has Michael! I tell you, Charlie, you are blind. You are out with snares and the woods and you never see what is destroying your brother—"

"You are foolish," said the rat catcher.

Mrs. Chalice turned, stripping suds from her hands, when Susanna's double knock sounded at the door. She came in wet from the rain outside, her hair dark and stranded across her face. She is like a big blown flower, thought Charlie, not fine, not delicate . . .

"Mrs. Chalice," she said breathlessly. "Is Michael—gone?"

She laughed gently and turned a little in his arms

"Aye, he's gone," said Mrs. Chalice, looking at Charlie. He met her eyes, pale like his own, and turned away to leave the two women alone. Mrs. Chalice watched the suds melt on her shining hands. "We must be doing something, Susanna," she said.

Michael came home too late to see Charlie that night, though Charlie waited in his room under the black beams until no more imaginings could keep him awake. And in the morning, Charlie left the house early. There was no-one out in the village at that hour, when the night was still lying on the valley, no light anywhere, no sound but rain tinselling on the ground, and Charlie's footsteps down the road. He was hurrying, away to the woods. He was afraid of talk in the village. The woods would not talk.

Yet when it was day, and a thin sun drying the grass, Charlie could not keep away from the village and went slowly down from the woods as though drawn by a thread; he had gone a night without Michael, without a woman, the woman, with only his own thoughts, and they were not enough. Going quickly past The Fox and Badger, he saw the woman at a window, and he stopped, oblivious of the noonday traffic in the street and of the watching eyes. "Good day," he called up to her.

She opened the window and smiled down at him. Her hair lay on her shoulders and he could see her neck and the paleness of her throat—and the shadow, the deepening, even below that. She was speaking. "Good day to you, rat catcher. Were you up early again today? You must let me come with you again."

"Aye, you must come," said Charlie.

Miss Maria Doveton saw the watching eyes. She looked down at Charlie standing alone in the street and, with no sign of her anger but a lift of her head, she said, "Yes, I will come. And you—you must come to see me again too, for there are times when it is lonely here."

"Why—I will gladly come and see you . . ." Charlie said.

"Good. I will look forward to it. Goodbye, rat catcher." As she closed the window she thought, That will start the tongues to wag a little more, if they can.

"You are right," said Charlie softly that evening, when he and Michael were before the fire and their mother sewing at the table. "She has apple-coloured eyes, the woman at The Fox and Badger."

Michael smiled at him. "Aye, Charlie, she has. She is like an apple, too, ripe as one and sweet."

"Have you tasted her, then?" said Mrs. Chalice.

"Why, Mother, that is no question to ask a man."

She leaned forward, her pale eyes bright. "It is a question that a mother might ask her son, when the woman is a witch, and an evil one."

Michael laughed. "Oh, Mother, she is no evil woman. That is your own imagining."

Yet he did not speak of Susanna, and soon afterwards he left Charlie and Mrs. Chalice alone, as he had the night before.

It was good, next morning, in a brighter sun that was glinting on dry grasses, to go to the woods. Charlie touched crinkled oak, satiny boles of birch here and there misting green, and while he went he whistled to the birds in the branches. He was so content that at first he did not see the figures standing against a tree with the sun behind them.

The woman put Michael's face aside to look at him, tenderly, her fingers exploring. His jaw was etched in the sun and the cool shadow, his mouth was as firm and mobile as a rose, his eyes narrow, not seeing her as clearly as she was so lovingly seeing him. She laughed, gently, and turned a little in his arms, and as she turned she saw Charlie.

"Oh look," she said. "There is the little rat catcher. Don't look so worried, rat catcher—we are not caught in a snare!"

Michael did not move, but as she smiled up at him she saw that his eyes were changed. She clutched his arm. "Darling, don't worry—let the people talk in the village! It is only the rat catcher."

"He is my brother," said Michael. "I must go."

But Charlie had slipped away from the woods where the birds were laughing in the trees, down under the shoulder of the hill to the village in its shadow.

When Charlie went into the cottage, his mother was sitting with Susanna, their heads bent low together. They looked up at him and Mrs. Chalice said, "What is it, Charlie?"

"I have seen them," he said.

"So it is true, is it? She is a witch, and an evil woman?"

"Aye, she is an evil woman."

"What will you do, Charlie?" asked Susanna.

"I will speak to Michael," said Charlie.

Miss Maria Doveton, left alone, put her arms about her little dog and thought, I was a fool to stay here, waiting for him, for my love to come and find me. I am a true Doveton. I have played with the rat catcher and his brother, little dog, and I am not used to the ways of these people. She spoke her thoughts to the little greyhound, who licked her face, and whined in happiness, for he liked her all to himself.

As she went down the hill at last, carrying the little dog in his ecstasy, she saw Michael hurrying up to her. "Maria!"

The little dog growled, and she closed his muzzle, and waited for Michael to come to her.

"Maria—I am sorry—please come with me now. My brother is gone away. He was surprised, that was all."

"And you? You ran so quickly after him—"

His hard fingers were on her shoulders, searching her back, farther, and she could not help but smile and sigh at him. The dog tumbled from her arms and crouched in fury at her feet.

They went up to the ridge, beyond the north edge of the wood, where the plough was still cold and the world still as though primeval. There was a mound there, a barrow, left green in the petrified furrows.

"What is it?" she said, stooping at the mouth of the barrow, looking into the dark earth-smelling tunnel.

"Go in, and see. It is an old place, this. They say there are elves within it, and men's bones."

"Michael—"

"Go on, farther. I am here, behind you."

The smell was of beasts who had sheltered there, died there when the snow had gathered while they slept. The woman could see nothing, only smell the heavy dark.

"Let me out," she said. "Let me out, Michael."

He did not speak; unable to see him, unable to turn, she said again, "Michael, let me out! Please, let me out."

Michael said softly, "All right, we will go out, then."

"Thank you. Thank you. It's the dark, and the smell, that frightens me."

In the sun that was levelling now over the north ridge, in the cold clear air, she laughed in relief, and lifted her arms to Michael. But he put them down, and turned her. His face was pitying, and, puzzled, she turned, and saw Susanna and Mrs. Chalice, and the rat catcher.

"You are evil," said the rat catcher. "And you made me foolish." He looked down at the small body of the dog, whose bright blood glistened in the sun.

"It was like a little rat," said Charlie.

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☐ VERSATILE YOUNG TALENT. Diana Winsor, who was born in Ulster in 1946, has already had experience of a variety of jobs. Her promise as a writer revealed itself at an early age, and last year she was placed second in the Sunday Times Magazine's competition for young authors. Her many other interests extend from riding, beagling and sailing to archaeology, music and the theatre.

One Day In The Life Of Clement Mossop

BY HECTOR BOLITHO

CLEMENT MOSSOP yawned and stretched his arms across the bed. His mind emerged from the confusion of sleep and, as his hand fell on the pillow beside him, he realised that he was alone; that Laura had gone to stay with her mother for two nights. The loneliness changed then to pettishness as he thought of the chore of cooking his own breakfast. Everything would be ready, of course, and the table would be laid. He could trust Laura for that. A light under the kettle, then under the frying pan, and the trick would be done. He stretched his arms once more and, refreshed by a deep breath, he became wholly awake.

Clement watched the shape of the central light hanging from the bedroom ceiling. This was usually the focus for his first thoughts, before he spoke to Laura. Today he was able to think of himself as someone separate from her. The physical habit of sleeping beside her, and the privilege of being able to slide his lonely hand across to her, were his chief defence against the world. Her love and friendship shielded him and helped him to bear the littleness of his own achievement.

He had been chief clerk in an estate office for eleven years, and he was trusted because he was a plodder. If ever the great tides of life had fascinated him and beckoned him to jump, there had always been the safe voice that whispered, "Stay where you are. Experiment is not for you, Clement Mossop."

So he remained at the office, and the young clerks who worked under him snatched his grains of knowledge and, on the wings of their dissatisfaction, they flew off to laurels and profit Clement Mossop could only covet from afar. Alone in bed, watching the

lampshade that marked the exact centre of the room, Clement thought of these things and shuddered. He ached to stretch out his hand and find Laura beside him.

Laura had made the lampshade. She had bought the parchment at one of the big stores and, in the winter evenings, two years ago, she had painted the Spanish galleons on it, and the birds, flying among the tidy clouds.

In the core of his doubting heart, Clement sometimes felt that Laura stayed with him only because of her own loyalty. It was folly to suppose that anyone with her shining independence could love him for his own sake. As he pulled himself up on the pillow, he looked about the room, at the signs of Laura's talents. The loose covers on the chairs, the pelmet, the little water-colour sketches of the beach at St. Ives; all were the work of her busy, clever hands.

They had gone to St. Ives for their first summer holiday, because he had been born there. He leaned on his elbow and saw the water-colours, on either side of the dressing-table. His mind skipped back thirty years, to the summers of his boyhood, with the Atlantic waves rolling in, and the anguished crying of the gulls.

Clement imagined that he was ten again; he felt the cool stone floor of the farmhouse kitchen against his young, bare feet. He had brought in some mushrooms from the field, to be cooked on the hot top of the stove. "Please, Mummy, with a bit of butter and some pepper."

And the lithograph over the fireplace in his mother's sitting room, of a soldierly-looking fellow, leaning against a harbour wall: a strong, broad man, looking out to sea, with one hand shading his eyes. The picture was called *Alone with his thoughts*.

"Shall I grow up to be as big as that some day?" he had once asked his mother.

"Hark at the shrimp," she had said, with a laugh of affectionate derision. "Just hark at the shrimp."

He had never spoken of the big man in the picture again.

Clement looked at the clock on the table beside the bed. If Laura had been there she would have shaken him long ago and said, "Come on, lazybones. It's time the bread-winner was on his way to work." The clock told him that it was twenty-five minutes to eight. He looked towards the rug, on which he had left his slippers the night before.

He sat up, his eyes wide open, for the slippers were not his own. His were brown, and worn at the heels: the slippers on the rug were bright green. He looked at the chair on which he had

spread his clothes. His striped trousers and black coat had disappeared and in their place was a tweed suit. Then he looked at his hands, spread upon the eiderdown. They were not his own.

Clement leapt from the bed and rushed to the dressing-table. The face that looked back at him was that of the man in the old lithograph, *Alone with his thoughts*. Trembling with alarm, he looked at the big muscular body, which was not his. He looked about the room and saw everything from an unfamiliar height. He hurried then to another looking-glass, over the fireplace, hoping that his own face would look back at him. But no. As he ran his hands over his unfamiliar features, delicately, as if they might crumble into dust, his fear changed to exultation.

He felt the courage of his stature and the confidence of his proud face, but for only a second. When he turned and saw Laura's copy of Rupert Brooke's poems on the table, her pin tray and her shoe box, the fear came back. Every possession that was his had changed. The clock was there, because it was Laura's. It still ate up the minutes and told him that within a quarter of an hour he must be dressed and on his way to the office.

Clement touched the strange clothes. He slid out of his pyjamas, washed, shaved and put on the tweed suit, with gingerly shyness, for it was big and unfamiliar. They were not clothes he would have chosen for himself. A tweed that smacked of country lanes, a shirt with more colour in it than he would have dared, a tie he would have passed over very quickly in a shop. But he put them on. Then he went into the kitchen, for he was hungry. His hands had changed, but they had not lost their habits. They lit the gas and found the butter in the cooler.

As he ate his fried egg and bacon, Clement realised that he could not go to his office: he could not walk into Mr. Philpott's room and say, "I am Clement Mossop, whatever you may think." It would be ludicrous to say, "I am four inches taller than I was yesterday and I have changed my face."

The horror of the situation seemed to twist his brain; he hurried upstairs to the telephone and dialled the number of his office. Then he spoke for the first time that morning, and he realised that his voice had changed. It was deep and slow. He spluttered for a second, and then he said, "I am speaking for Mr. Mossop. Will you please tell Mr. Philpott when he comes in that Mr. Mossop is too ill to come to the office today. He has a bad cold. If he wants to speak to him, he can ring him. You have the number."

Clement put down the receiver and walked to the window of

the bedroom. The street below was busy with the morning traffic: boys on delivery bicycles, a milk van with its rattling bottles, and the neighbours he knew well enough to say good morning to, walking down their short garden paths, their faces washed, and their hats and their gloves looking too precise.

He looked at his own clothes again and, with shy slowness, put his hand in one of the pockets of the jacket. It was quite incredible. There was his season ticket for the Underground, his wireless licence, and the letter from the insurance company. His pockets became an adventure and he plunged his hands into them feverishly. All his possessions were there. He was fingering his cigarette lighter as the telephone bell rang. He picked up the receiver and listened.

It was Laura's voice, and Clement trembled. "Oh, is that you? I am glad I got you before you left."

Clement cleared his throat and answered, "Yes, I am a little late. I have to go down to Ealing." Having begun to lie, he found it easy. "They've sent somebody out for my papers . . ."

Laura interrupted him. "Your voice sounds odd, Clem. Have you got a cold?"

He answered, "No. I'm just a bit husky. Not a cold."

Laura laughed then. "You mustn't catch any colds, you know. Not when I'm away. But I'm sorry you're going down to Ealing because I wanted you to wrap up a night-dress for me and drop it in here on the way to the office. I came without one and I had to wear one of Mother's woolly ones. It tickled so much I couldn't sleep. You won't be coming . . . Well—I can run over for it before lunch."

Clement hurried his answer. "No. No. Don't do that. This fellow that's come from the office, he won't mind. He's got to go back that way. He won't mind."

Laura murmured a half-hearted protest. "Don't trouble him, Clem. It doesn't matter all that much."

"Oh, it's all right. He won't mind," he said. But as he spoke he realised the terror of what was to come.

He only half heard Laura as she answered, "All right. Wrap up one of the pink ones, in the lower drawer, and just scratch the address on it. I'll be here to thank him. And don't catch cold or I'll come home and spank you."

He said goodbye and replaced the receiver. As he walked towards a looking-glass again, his fears weakened and he began to feel confidence in his height—as if he were already used to being four inches taller than the Clement Mossop of yesterday. He looked in the glass and at his face, in dazed wonder at the

change. Once more he touched his forehead and his cheeks, but now with growing confidence.

Clement found Laura's night-dress and wrapped it into a parcel; then he went into the hall, to find his coat and gloves and hat. But the hat was not the sober black one which he had bought with such pride, last spring; they had all changed. He put on the strange hat, hung the coat over his arm, picked up the gloves as if they were living things that might bite him, and walked from the house.

There were no familiar objects in the street to remind him that he was no longer Clement Mossop. But as he walked, he realised that he must assume some name. Every time he contemplated the moment when he would face Laura, he shivered, but this game of inventing a name fascinated him. It was to be a stately name. A name that would sit well upon his broad shoulders.

He whispered, "The first must be John. John Ironside. Ironside is a strong name. Or Malcolm Ironside. Not Clement Mossop; that's a weed of a name. Malcom Ironside. John Ironside. Malcolm Ironside."

He went on, beneath the plane trees and past the shops, and across the squares where children played with hoops. Clement almost swaggered then, as he walked over the grass, with the laughter of the children, and the shafts of early morning sunlight ornamenting the window panes and the street lamps. He swaggered on, until he remembered that when he turned the next corner he would come to the dour façade of red bricks behind which his mother-in-law had her flat. He climbed the stairs, up three floors, until he came to the door.

Laura opened it almost as soon as his finger left the bell. She smiled and said, "I'm Clement Mossop's wife. Are you . . .?"

Out of a gulp of fear came the answer, "My name is John Ironside." He repeated it, as if he were not convinced. "John Ironside."

Laura was warm and friendly. So that was how she seemed to other people. That uncritical generosity that made you feel liked and confident. She opened the door wide and said, "Come in for a second."

Clement stepped back. "No, no. I can't do that. I must get back to the office. A lot to do, you know."

"Oh, as you will," Laura answered. "You saw my husband. Did he seem all right?"

"Oh, quite all right," Clement said.

"I was a bit worried." Laura frowned. "A bit worried, because he sounded as if he had a cold." Clement reassured her.

"But he had a husky voice. Did he seem husky when you saw him?" she asked.

Clement shook his head. He looked at her and a small voice within him tempted him to speak. "Tell her. Tell her. You've got to tell her some time." But he forced his face into a smile, and said, "I ought to be going."

"You must come back with him to dinner some night." She turned and placed the parcel on a table. "I do hope that he hasn't caught a cold," she said, then, shaking her head, "Women are fussy, aren't they? But perhaps you're not married."

She did not wait for his answer. "I do fuss. I know. He would be horrified if he could hear me. But then, you see, Mr. Ironside, my husband is a saint, and saints have to be taken care of, you know."

Clement repeated the word aloud, "A saint?"

"But you mustn't tell him I said so. You only see one side of him at the office."

"I suppose I do," Clement answered.

"He'd never forgive me, but you *will* see that he doesn't sit in a draught? He's such an uncomplaining man. He's so brave about everything. I suppose saints are like that." Laura laughed again and gave Clement her hand.

He took it and said, "Goodbye."

The door closed and he walked down the stairs. Laura had called him a saint. Did she really think so? "I suppose saints are like that," she had said. He walked along Baker Street and made his way towards the Park, as if he were a god. A singing sensation crept over his body. His shoulders spread wide and his paces grew.

How many times he had walked here, with Laura, on Sunday afternoons, to hear the band play and to see the rabbits on the other side of the fence. They used to pretend the Park was their own and that the others walked there only because they, Clement and Laura, allowed them to. Laura had read a book about the Park and she knew every statue, every turn of the paths. Now he walked here by himself.

For a long time he did not think of what might happen in the days to come. Only those words, "I suppose saints are like that", warmed him as he repeated them. He wondered, as he walked, whether the people who passed him could see, in the flash of his look, the contentment that his heart enjoyed. A little later he was hungry, so he walked towards Victoria and found a restaurant.

Then he walked back to his house. He took off the strange hat

and placed the strange coat on the table in the hall. "I don't like hall stands," Laura had said. "They remind me of boarding houses." She had that talent for imprinting her own decision on every object in their lives. Clement looked into the glass at the foot of the stairs.

Now, in the house, the absurd horror of what lay before him came back again. He would have to go away. Abroad! How could he ever confess to Laura? He could not explain something to her when he could not explain it to himself. He had been too shy even to tell her of the lithograph and of his boyhood dream, and of the cry of the gulls.

When he had been back in the house an hour, the telephone rang. Clement picked it up and Mr. Philpott's voice answered him.

"Is that you, Mossop?"

"Yes, sir," Clement answered.

"Your voice sounds pretty terrible."

"Yes, sir. A bit husky."

"Well, this is all nonsense about coming back tomorrow. We can't have you laid up. Got to nurse our valuable men, you know." Mr. Phillpott laughed then, with a friendliness that Clement had never heard before. "I am sending you something that will do you good."

Clement half whispered, "Thank you, sir."

"I lunched at home and my wife gave me something for you."

"That's very kind of you, sir."

"That's all right, Mossop. But don't think of coming back until you're better."

Clement put down the receiver in amazement. "Got to nurse our valuable men." And Laura had said, "I suppose saints are like that."

About half past four the door bell rang. Clement opened it and there stood young Bishop, the imp who ran the office messages.

"Is Mr. Mossop at home, sir?" asked the boy.

"Yes," Clement answered. "But he's not very well. You have something for him."

"Yes, sir. Some fruit and things from the guv'nor."

"I'll take them up to him," Clement said.

The lad turned to go. Then he paused and said, "Tell Mr. Mossop we hope he'll be better soon."

Clement said, "I will."

"They told me to say so at the office."

"That's very kind of them. I will tell him," Clement answered.

The boy went and Clement closed the door. He made his own evening meal and at nine o'clock he went to bed. He peeled off the clothes of John Ironside and once more suffered the frightening sensation of looking at a body that was strange to him. When he had turned out the light he lay for a long time, gathering the pattern of the day together and recalling Laura's smile as she said, "Saints have to be taken care of." Whatever darkness lay waiting for him, whatever loneliness there might be, he would know this gratitude for ever. His only enemy had been the doubt that ate into his own heart, and this enemy was dead.

When Clement woke next morning, he stretched his arms as he had always done. His right hand fell upon the pillow next to him and reminded him that Laura was not there. Then the conglomeration of the previous day came back and he sat up in bed, quickly. He looked at the light-shade, with the galleons and the birds. Then down to his hands. They were the slim hands of Clement Mossop: made to push a pen and never draw a sword. He jumped from his bed and rushed to the looking-glass. His own little face looked back at him. The clothes on the chair were his own; and his slippers.

He washed and dressed, and he made his breakfast. He ate quickly and he hurried to the door. His coat and hat were in the hall: his dear, black hat, that settled on his head, pleased to be back again.

As he walked along Oxford Street, he stopped at a shop and bought himself a pair of new gloves—the most expensive in the tray. He drew the right one on to his hand and went his way, rejoicing.

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SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD
(*APRIL ISSUE*)

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Bedtime

To the unromantic a bed is simply a piece of furniture, raised on four legs, and with a surface more or less adapted to the biological function of sleep. Those who think of beds in this way are to be pitied; the subtleties of life escape them.

MARY EDEN, *The Saturday Book*

Hard Lying

What makes my bed seem hard,
seeing it is soft?
Or why slips down
the coverlet so oft?
Although the nights be long,
I sleep not though
My sides are sore
with tumbling to and fro.

OVID, *Translated by Christopher Marlowe*

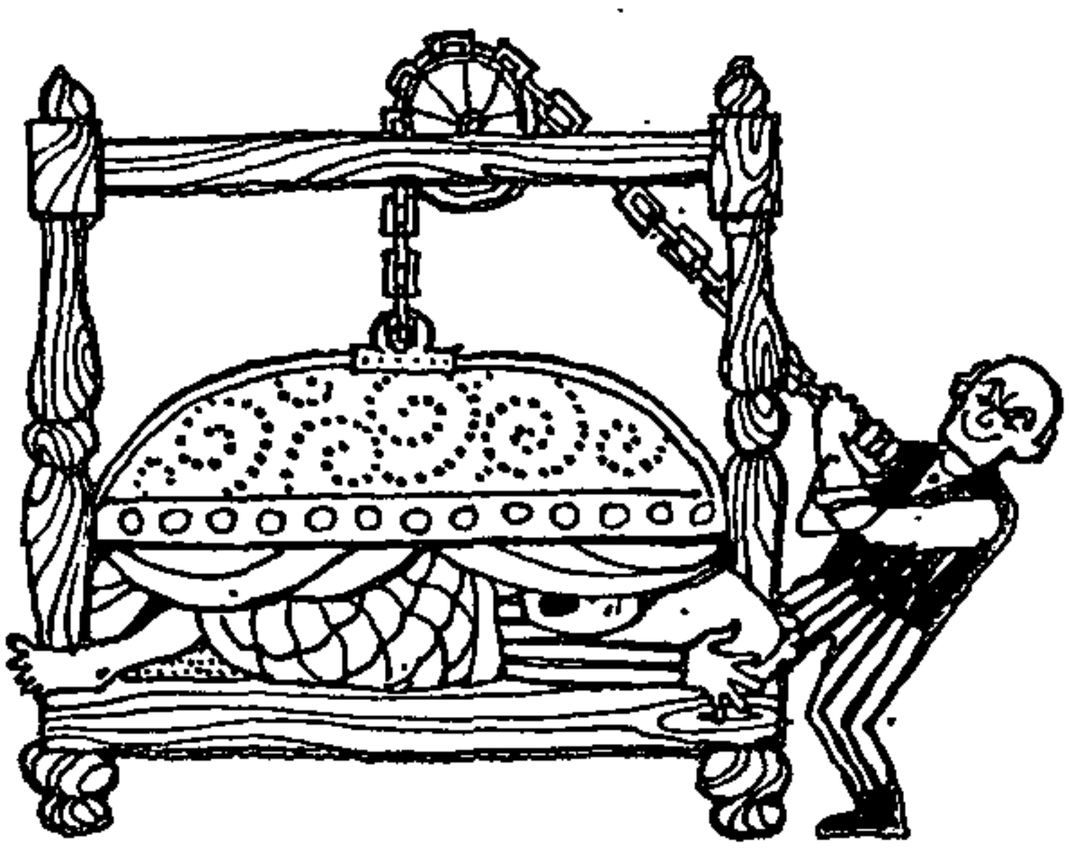
Lying in bed would be an altogether perfect and supreme experience if only one had a coloured pencil long enough to draw on the ceiling.

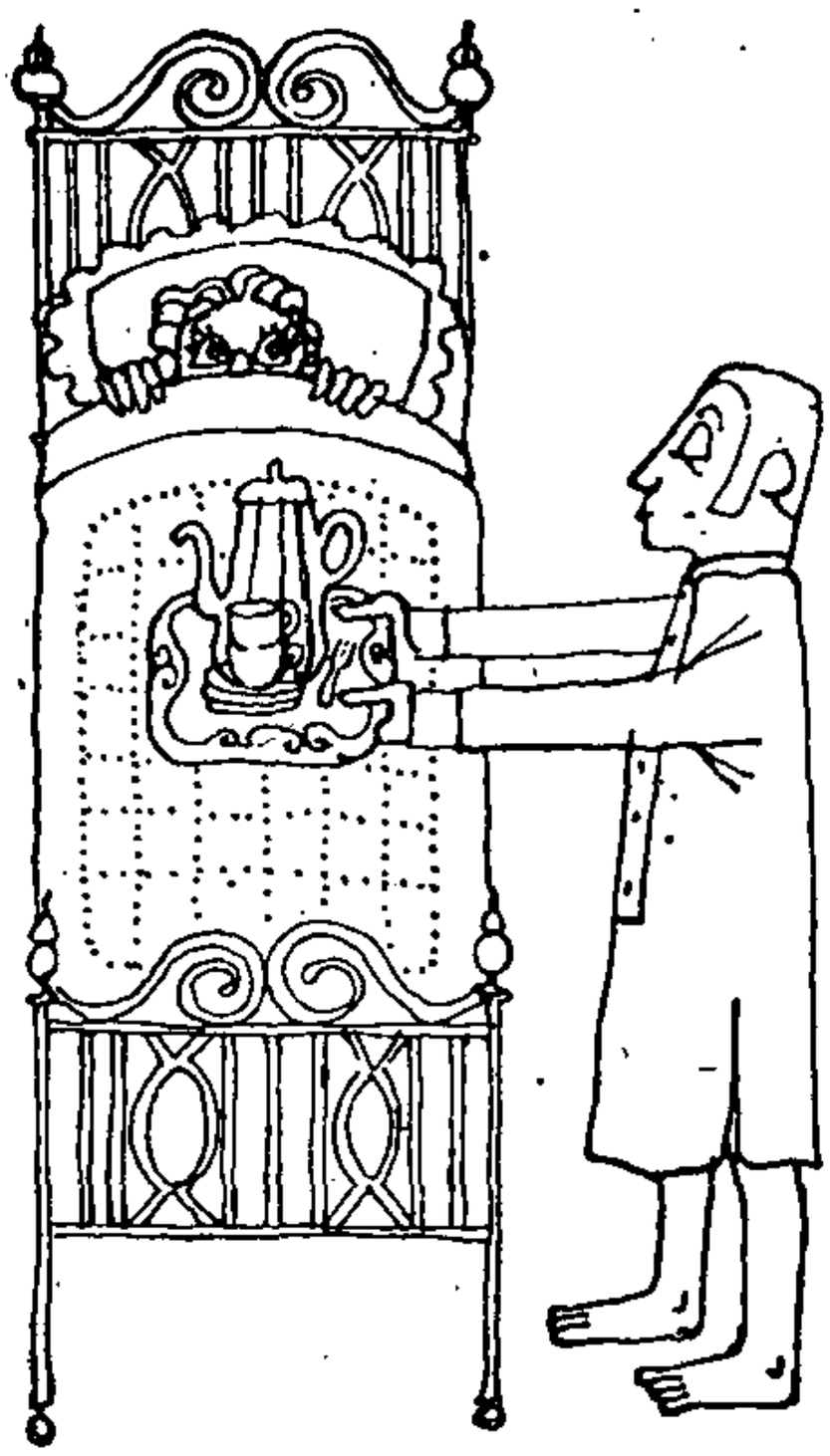
G. K. CHESTERTON, *Lying in Bed*

Goodnight—Sweet Screams

The most sinister bed I can recall, always after that of Procrustes, is the four-poster the top of which quietly and remorselessly descended on the sleeper during the small hours and smothered him. I never see a four-poster without recalling this story.

E. V. LUCAS, *Bed*





Room Service

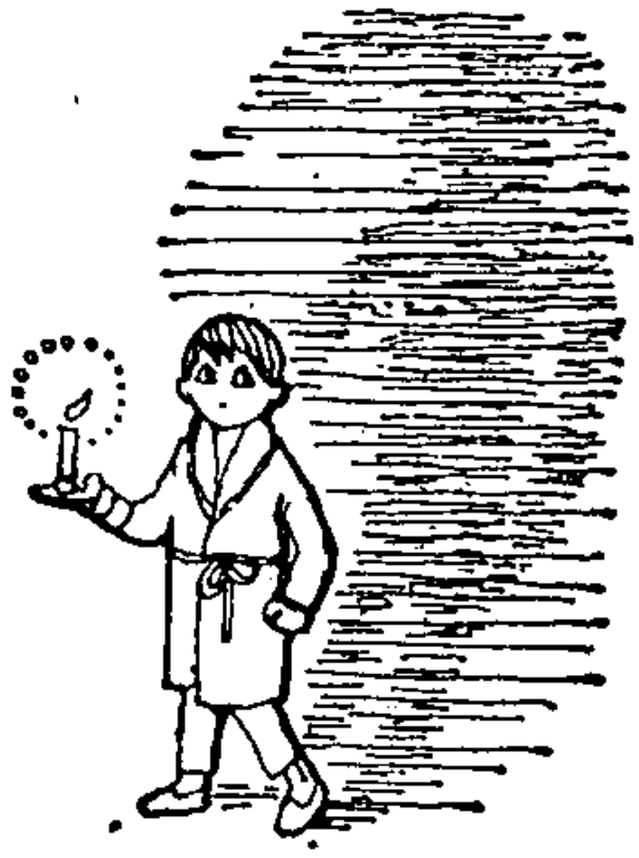
A lady was awoke in the night with the disagreeable sense of not being alone in the room, and soon felt a thud upon her bed. There was no doubt that someone was moving to and fro in the room, and that hands were constantly moving over her bed. She was so dreadfully frightened that at last she fainted. When she came to herself, it was broad daylight, and she found that the butler had walked in his sleep and had laid the table for fourteen upon her bed.

AUGUSTUS HARE, *1792–1834*

Dread Time

Must we to bed indeed? Well then,
Let us arise and go like men,
And face with an undaunted tread
The long black passage up to bed.

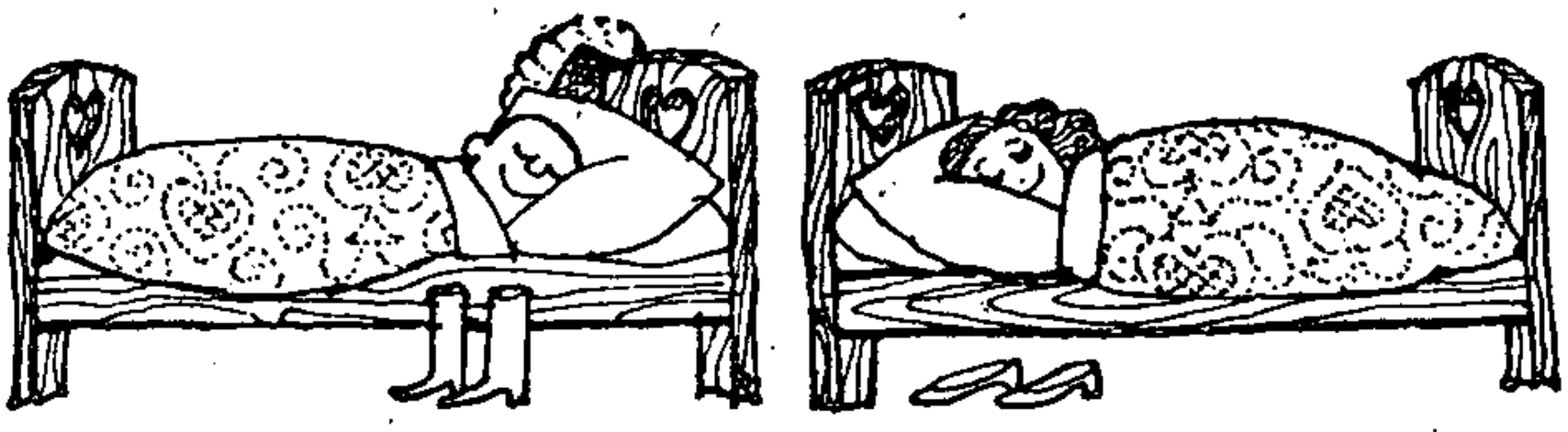
R. L. STEVENSON, *A Child's Garden of Verses*



And So Two Beds

Rode easily to Welling, where we supped well, and had two beds in the room and so lay single . . . and I never had so much content in all my life, and so my wife says it was with her.

SAMUEL PEPYS



In bed we laugh, in bed we cry;
And born in bed, in bed we die;
The near approach a bed may show
Of human bliss to human woe.

ISAAC DE BENSERADE, *A Son Lit*
Translated by Samuel Johnson

Foreign Climbs

To the blasé English bed-goer, accustomed all his life to the same old hackneyed style of bed night after night, there is something very pleasantly piquant about the experience of trying to sleep in a German bed. He does not know it is a bed at first. He thinks that someone has been going around the room, collecting all the sacks and cushions and antimacassars and such articles that he has happened to find about, and has piled them up on a wooden tray ready for moving.

JEROME K. JEROME, *Diary of a Pilgrimage*

. . . We went to bed in cupboards so high from the floor that we climbed them by a ladder; we were covered with feathers, that is, we lay between two ticks stuffed with them, and all little enough to keep one warm.

JOHN EVELYN, *17th Century*

By the by, the French soft feather beds are destroying me by relaxing my nerves.

BOSWELL

O western wind, when wilt thou blow,
That the small rain down may rain?
Christ! that my love were in my arms,
And I in my bed again!

ANON, *16th Century*

TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

BY MICHAEL GILBERT

THE German artillery observation officer said, "I shall now proceed to range one gun on to the slit trench. If you will use your binoculars, gentlemen, you will observe it quite easily at the foot of the small knoll due East of where you are now standing."

The small group of privileged spectators raised field glasses in gloved hands and focussed them.

"The trench is exactly one and a half metres deep and one metre in width. It has been dug into chalk and flint. Owing to unavoidable discrepancies in the charges, it would not normally be possible to guarantee actually to hit the trench more than once in a hundred rounds."

"I wager," said General Runnecke, who commanded XIV Corps in the Banja Luka area of Jugoslavia and who was, therefore, nominally at least, the senior officer present, "that he did all his ranging before we arrived."

"In his place I should have done so," agreed the staff officer with the gunner tabs who was standing at his elbow.

"Fire!"

The report from the gun, sited some five thousand yards to their rear, arrived at the same time as the shell, which threw up a puff of white chalk and grey smoke just beyond the slit trench.

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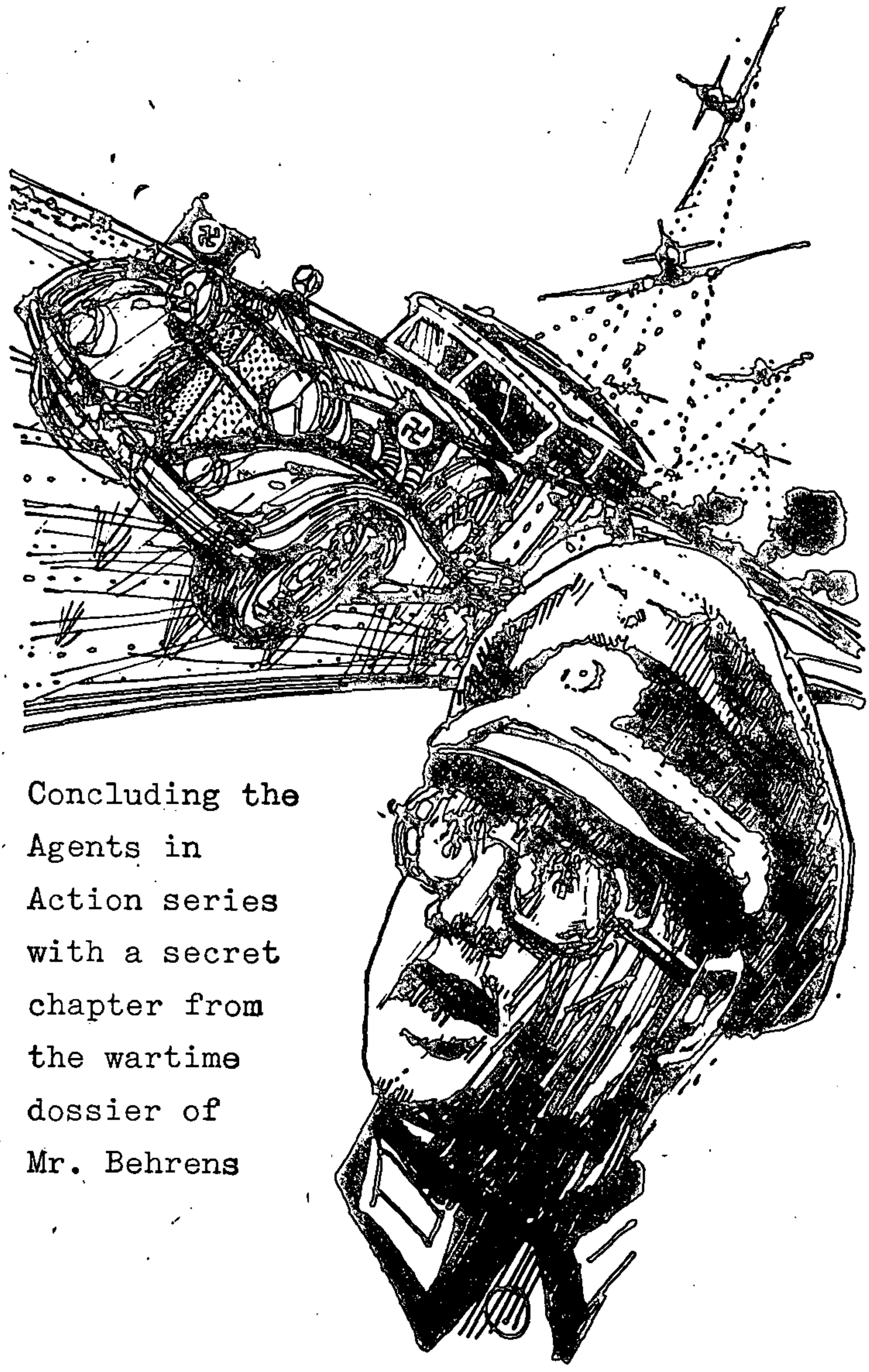

Concluding the Agents in Action series with a secret chapter from the wartime dossier of Mr. Behrens

"Correct for line," said the observation officer smugly. "Plus for range. I will drop fifty metres and repeat." The second shell landed, if anything, slightly further forward.

"You will see what I meant when I spoke of the inaccuracy of a high explosive charge," said the observation officer. "The range that time was shorter but the shell went further. I shall fire again at the same elevation."

This one landed almost on the lip of the trench.

"Two plus, one minus," said the observation officer. "I think we can accept that as the range. We will now repeat, using the new experimental fuse."

There was a stir of interest among the spectators. This time it was different. Instead of a dull report when the shell landed, there was the sharp, distinctive crack of shrapnel.

"Height of burst," said the observation officer, "approximately ten metres. That should be satisfactory."

"Damned uncomfortable, if you ask me," said General Runnecke loudly, and the officers laughed. The only man who appeared entirely serious, his gaze concentrated on the slit trench, was the single civilian among the uniformed group. He was a thin, serious, brown-faced man in his early thirties, with a pair of steel-rimmed glasses on his beaky nose. Despite the January weather he was wearing only a thin raincoat.

He said, in good but clearly not native German, "By my estimation, seven and a half metres."

The observation officer ignored this and said, "I shall order the same gun now to fire six rounds. This will avoid the necessity of ranging the other guns of the troop, but will produce the cumulative effect of a salvo of six guns."

The six cracks followed each other at twenty second intervals. The height of burst was unmistakably consistent. As fast as one cloud of yellowish lyddite smoke shredded away in the breeze, another filled its place.

"Stand your troop down," said the general. "We will inspect the target. Come along with me, Doctor Brancos."

The whole group moved downhill towards the slit trench, the general with the civilian in the lead, followed by a stout, white-faced officer wearing the insignia of a *gruppenfuehrer* in the SS, the junior officers a decorous pace or two behind. At the edge of the trench they paused.

There were six men in it. They had been fastened there by a chain attached at both ends to posts hammered into the ground and passing through iron shackles round the ankle of each. Four of the men were clearly and horribly dead. Two of them were

still moving. General Runnecke motioned to the junior officer behind him, who drew an automatic, stepped forward and shot them both carefully through the back of the neck.

"I think," said the general to Dr. Brancos, "that we may regard the experiment as eminently satisfactory."

Dr. Brancos, who appeared to be as unmoved as any of his military colleagues by the sight in the trench, said, "I should like to examine, with your doctors, the precise nature of the wounds in the four who were killed. It was unfortunate that you felt obliged to shoot the other two. If they had lived, it would have been even more interesting to have examined *their* injuries."

"No doubt," said General Runnecke curtly.

In a report which he sent that evening to the War Ministry in Berlin he said, "In this experiment we were able to make use of six Jugoslav terrorists who had been captured in plain clothes behind our lines in possession of explosives, and who were to have been executed in any event. One equivalent salvo of the new fuse killed four men and fatally injured two. This represents the quite dramatic superiority of this wireless fuse over the standard powder fuse for shrapnel, which, as every artillery officer knows, can never be guaranteed to detonate within a hundred feet of the ground, and, indeed, in half the cases buries itself in the ground and fails to detonate at all. I would recommend that Dr. Brancos be put in touch forthwith with the Army Bureau of Weapon Research—"

As he wrote these words the general paused. He knew that the all powerful *Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, or RSHA, the co-ordinating body of the SS, had recently added to its already inflated authority a Section VII concerned with scientific exploitation, and he suspected that they would want to grab Dr. Brancos for themselves as an important pawn in their constant struggle with the Army for power and prestige. What he was wondering was whether he could arrange for his report to go to the War Ministry *without* being seen by the SS authorities.

He might have spared himself any worry. The SS *gruppenfuehrer* had already reported through his own signals troop to the RSHA, who received the report a day before the War Ministry.

When Dr. Brancos arrived in Berlin, therefore, he was not met by an Army Officer but by a polite *obersturmfuehrer*, who introduced himself as Lieutenant Mailler, and whisked the doctor straight away to a flat at Lichterfelde outside Berlin. Here, in the

days that followed, Mailler proved himself a patient and instructed listener. He had been trained in the Communications section of the SS and knew a good deal about wireless. He had to admit, however, that Dr. Brancos knew a great deal more than he did.

The doctor said, "I am, by profession, a mining engineer. Coming from a small country like Albania there were few facilities, and I was therefore educated and trained in Italy, at Perugia, and later in Milan. I speak better Italian than German, I fear."

Mailler said, with a smile, "You speak our language very well and clearly."

"I am obliged. It was in the uranium mines at Marcovograd that I developed the technique of the answering fuse. Like most inventions, the idea came to me by accident. In the mines we used a type of geiger counter. You know what I mean?"

"I have heard of them."

"They are, in essence, small receiving sets. They answer to the radio-active emissions of uranium. Once we had a very difficult explosive blast to detonate." Dr. Brancos held out two thin brown hands. "In the mass of uranium we bury an explosive charge. The uranium emits radio signals. Could we not, I said to myself, cause those signals to bounce back and detonate the charge at any required distance? All that would be necessary would be to calculate the wave-length precisely—" The doctor brought his two hands slowly together "—and—pouf!—we cause an explosion at exactly the point we require without wires or apparatus of any sort."

"And did it work?"

"In mining, no. It was impracticable. But the seed of the idea was there. A shrapnel shell with a small and simple wireless transmitter in the head. It approaches the earth. The transmission bounces back—at whatever height you wish—the shell explodes. No more powder rings, no more fuse setting, no more guesswork. A detonation at precisely the most effective height."

"Wonderful," said Mailler, and meant it.

"There were difficulties. My prototype fuses were much too sensitive. They could be set off by a cloud of rain. Even a flock of birds. But I developed a system of shutters—"

Dr. Brancos seized a writing pad and pencil and started to sketch as he talked.

At the end of two hours, his brain whirling with technicalities, Lieutenant Mailler made his excuses. He spoke on the telephone to the head of his section, *Standartenfuehrer* Bach. "The man is

a genius," he said. "I'm sure of that. He lost me half a dozen times in the details, but the idea *must* be sound. It operates on the same principle as radar—"

"It is certainly effective," said Colonel Bach. "I have received the close-up photographs of the target trench. I am only glad I saw them after lunch and not before."

"He could be a great asset to our section—"

"*If* we get him," said Bach. "The army want him for themselves. There is a fight going on now on a level too high for me to interfere. By the way, I assume you have checked the security clearance?"

"All the ordinary checks have been made," said Mailler. "His papers are in order. His luggage has been thoroughly examined and contains nothing out of the way. It would, of course, be more satisfactory if we could get a positive identification."

Bach thought about this and then said, "There is a man in Balkan Department of Section VI. The name, I think, is Munthe. He comes from Albania or Monte Negro, or one of those goddamned holes, and he was a professor at Perugia. He should know Brancos, by name at least."

Professor Munthe, old, grey-haired and white bearded, examined the papers which Mailler laid on his desk, and shook his head slowly. He said, "This man is a fake. Possibly a spy. I was at Perugia during all the years he states that he was there. We had not more than a handful of Albanians. There was no Brancos among them."

"You are sure?" said Mailler anxiously. "It is most important. The reputations of some very senior officers are now involved."

"If you doubt me, confront me with him."

"I will be back in half an hour," said Mailler, and was better than his word.

When Dr. Brancos came into his office, Professor Munthe rose to his feet and stared at him fixedly. The doctor stared back, then a half smile crossed his face. "It is more than ten years," he said, "but you have not greatly changed, Herr Professor."

The old man blinked as if he was trying to recapture an elusive memory. When Brancos would have spoken again, he held up one finger in a gesture of the classroom and said, "*Not* Brancos, Boros. Stefan Boros."

"It is true," said Brancos. "I had family difficulties. I found it expedient to change my name."

"Now that you mention it, I remember being told of it. I met a mutual friend a year ago in Ravenna. Alessandro Piero—"

Lieutenant Mailler said hastily, "I can see you are old friends. You will have much to talk over. I will leave you."

He made his way straight to his own office on a lower floor of the building, extracted a flask of brandy from a drawer in his desk and treated himself to a stiff drink.

If Brancos had been a fraud and his invention a fake and a lot of important people had made fools of themselves, he had a shrewd idea that his own head would have been one of the first to roll.

As he was finishing the drink the telephone on his desk purred. The man at the other end was so senior that the lieutenant clicked his heels and stood rigidly to attention when answering it. His end of the conversation was confined to saying "Yes" half a dozen times, and finally "At once". And to Dr. Brancos, later that evening, he said, "The Fuehrer himself has made the decision. Your invention will go to the Eastern Front. You yourself are seconded to Army Group North with the temporary rank of major. You will be flown to Rzhev on the Volga tomorrow."

Dr. Brancos said, "Impossible. I shall have to spend tomorrow doing some shopping." He seemed unexcited by this dramatic turn of events.

"Shopping?"

"If I'm to be a major I shall need a uniform surely?"

"All that will be provided at Rzhev."

All that, and a great deal more, was provided in the months that followed. Army Group North had been commanded, during the hard fighting of the previous autumn and the stalemate of that spring, by General Helmuth Busche, whose star was now so firmly in the ascendant that he was spoken of as a possible supreme commander of the Eastern Front. He was a tall, fair-haired, red-faced Saxon, nearly six and a half feet in height, and Dr. Brancos observed him from afar and learned that he was a great man; recognised as a good soldier by the hardest school of professional military opinion in the world, but managing somehow to be liked as well as admired.

The doctor himself was placed under the command of Colonel Franz Mulbach, head of the Army Communications section, and was allotted as his workshop and quarters, a hut in the forest of huts which had sprung up suddenly in and around the ruins of Rzhev.

This hut, in the months that followed, became the centre of much activity, involving technicians from both the Artillery and the Signals sections of the army. From time to time Dr. Brancos

would pay visits to forward observation posts to check the accuracy of his fuses, which were now going into mass production.

"If they are to achieve maximum effect," he said, "we must be careful not to demonstrate them too soon. When we fire them we will get them to explode at irregular heights so that they will appear to observers on the Russian side no different from the old, inefficient powder fuses. They will then take no special precautions."

Colonel Mulbach, a jovial barrel of a man, agreed with this. He had walked over, as he sometimes did, late at night, to sit beside the stove in Dr. Brancos' hut, smoke a cigar and talk about the war.

"As you will have seen," he said, "from your visits to the front —you must not, incidentally, expose yourself unnecessarily; to lose you now would be a fatal blow to the Reich—we are up against a hard line of interlocked defensive positions. The Russians have had all the winter to deepen and strengthen their trenches. When our offensive starts, the neutralisation of these trenches will be the most important feature."

"Has a date been fixed?"

"It will depend a little on the weather. This cursed Russian winter is slow to relax its grip, but the last week of April or the first week of May is spoken of, and it is then that we may expect a most important visitor."

"You mean—?"

"I mean our Fuehrer himself. He will come in person to confer with our commanders, to lay down the general lines of strategy and to wish us good fortune. I understand that he has expressed a personal interest in the work that you are doing here. It may even be possible to introduce you to him."

As Dr. Brancos moved his head, the red light from the stove shone on his glasses. He said, "It would be an indescribable honour."

It was a week after this conversation, in the early evening, that Colonel Mulbach arrived to find Dr. Brancos at work on his blueprints. The colonel had brought his car and was in full uniform. He said, "I am to take you to see General Busche. He wishes to speak to you."

"About what?" said Dr. Brancos. He seemed irritated by the interruption of his work.

"That we shall see," said the colonel.

During the drive into the centre of Rzhev he was more silent than usual. They dismounted at the side door of the big square seminary which formed the personal headquarters of the

general, walked along an endless and echoing corridor without meeting a soul, climbed flights of stairs and traversed further passageways, their footsteps deadened now by strips of matting laid on the floor. At the end of this corridor they came to double doors which opened on to an ante-room.

Here there were two desks set at angles and positioned to guard an inner door. Cards on the desks identified the men behind them as Major Nachtigal and Captain Heimroth. The captain rose to his feet, shook hands with Colonel Mulbach, cast a critical look at Dr. Brancos' creased and ill-fitting uniform, went over to the inner door, knocked and went inside.

There was a murmur of conversation, the door re-opened and the captain reappeared and beckoned the visitors in. It was a comfortable room. A fire of logs was blazing in the open stove and in front of it, tall, erect and strikingly impressive in the undress uniform of the Prussian Guards Regiment, stood General Helmuth Busche.

The General waited until the door had clicked shut and then turned to Colonel Mulbach and said in German, "So! This is the little English spy who has been sent to help us kill the Fuehrer." And then, in laboured but understandable English, "How do you do, Mr. Bairentz?"

BACK in the Brancos hut, with the door safely bolted, Colonel Mulbach said, "I hope you will forgive my reticence of the last few months. It was necessary to make certain checks first."

"I was beginning to wonder," said Mr. Behrens, "if I was on a wild-goose chase. All we knew in London was that a plot was being hatched by a group of officers on the Eastern Front to kill Hitler and end the war by negotiation, and that they needed technical assistance. We thought that if I played my cards right I should be sent here and that the plotters would make contact with me. That's really all I knew."

"I must confess," said the Colonel, "that I am surprised you have penetrated as far as you have."

"Part of it was calculation, part luck. The calculation consisted in giving away the new VT fuse. We reckoned that your scientists would arrive at it sooner or later. What we were presenting them with was eighteen months of our own research."

"A tempting bait. And the luck?"

"We happened to have a contact in your RSHA with exactly the necessary knowledge to check my credentials. In fact, my

story was carefully tailored to fit in with his. So it was pretty certain that a confrontation between us would eventually be arranged."

"Even so," said the Colonel, "Lady Fortune must have smiled on you. You can have little idea of the thoroughness of our security machine. Everyone—certainly every official in the Reich from village postmaster to Commanding General—has a dossier in that giant card-index of the section known as *Amt IV* (*a*) 6(*a*) —harmless-sounding initials for an unparalleled instrument of tyranny!

The information typed on those cards has been collected or extorted by the Gestapo, and when you consider that normal interrogation may involve a thin steel spike being driven down the centre of your finger until it reaches the knuckle bone, you will appreciate that very few men or women are likely to withhold information."

"No," said Mr. Behrens. "I do see that."

"You will appreciate also the risks which are run by those who dream of conspiring against the head of such a state. Even when those dreams are no more than thoughts whispered to oneself. General Busche is a patriot. His record is clean. When Germany has lost the war, as she will in a year or two, he could look forward to the certainty of retirement—Army Group Commanders are very rarely casualties, even on the *Ost-Front*—and an honourable old age on his estates in Prussia. Instead, so as to have the chance of shortening the war by two years with a negotiated peace, he is prepared to face ignominy and death. On the last occasion that a conspirator was detected he was hanged, yes, but not on a rope. He was hanged by a steel butcher's hook. It took him three hours to die. Every minute of those hours was recorded so that the Fuehrer might entertain himself that evening. A first feature film, you might say."

"Loathsome," said Mr. Behrens.

The Colonel seemed not to hear him. He said, almost to himself, "We are coming to *Götterdämmerung*. The Twilight of the Gods. The time when the men of power at last realise that they too must perish, and determine to go out in a holocaust of blood and cruelty and death. When an Emperor of the Chaldeans died, five hundred slaves were killed to keep him company. Many more than five hundred Germans will perish if the Russians' hammer from the East strikes home on the anvil of the American and British forces in the West."

"Curiously enough," said Mr. Behrens dryly, "we should ourselves have no actual objection to ending the war two years

early. Had we ended our previous war in 1916, England would be a different country today."

"You are right," said the Colonel. His big face, which had gone red, now cracked into a smile. "As always, the British are practical. No more heroics. Down to details. When the Fuehrer arrives, he will come in a Junkers 52 of his own flight. When he returns to his headquarters at Rastenburg, it is normal for any high priority despatches to go with him in a special satchel. This bag will contain, in a compartment, enough explosive to destroy the plane and a time fuse which must be set for one hour and must be completely reliable. Do you think you can make it for us?"

"That is what I am here for," said Mr. Behrens.

"Good. Apart from the General there are only three men fully in the conspiracy. Two of them you met this evening, Major Nachtigal and Captain Heimroth. They are reliable. They are related to the General by blood. The third is Luftwaffe Major Lecke. He was absent today checking the probable flight schedules. He, too, is trustworthy. Unfortunately none of these three men can actually place the message satchel on the Fuehrer's plane. It would not normally be part of their duties, and to make a single abnormal move would invite immediate attention from eyes that miss nothing. However, at least we have Major Mendel."

"And who is Major Mendel?"

"He is an SS Major, my subordinate in the Signals, and has, for some months, been in treasonable communication, by wireless, with the Russians."

"He has *what*?"

"It is not uncommon. Nor is it too difficult. When the SS capture Russian agents they torture them to extract their codes and frequencies and then use them for themselves. Their excuse, of course, is that they are using these means to convey false information to the enemy. Once contact has been established, liaison can safely follow. A wireless message leaves no incriminating copy behind it."

"And what does Major Mendel hope to gain by his treason?"

"He is not doing it for himself but on behalf of SS General Pohl who commands all SS troops in this area. General Pohl likes to have his bread buttered on both sides. If we win, he will protect himself by having Major Mendel murdered. Probably me too, since I know of it. On the other hand, if we lose and are surrounded and ordered to fight to the last—an order our Fuehrer is very fond of giving—then he can use this established line of

communication to take himself over to the Russians as a welcome guest."

"But—" said Mr. Behrens.

"You wonder how this assists us? That, too, is simple. Once Major Mendel knows that there is a chance of Hitler being killed, the SS being reduced to impotence and the regular army gaining control, he will be faced with the possibility, in this event, of my reporting him to General Busche, who would have him shot. Therefore, to save his hide he will do what I tell him. As an SS Signals Major he is exactly the person to carry a message satchel to the airfield and place it on the Fuehrer's plane."

"You call it *Götterdämmerung*," said Mr. Behrens crossly. "For my taste it's not grand opera at all. It's low and vicious farce. Does no-one in this army play straight by anybody else? Does no-one trust anyone?"

Major Mulbach said, with a smile, "I trust you. Surely that is enough."

"I'm sorry," said Mr. Behrens. "I didn't mean to lose my temper. It's only because I'm so damned scared."

The work itself was not hard to organise. Mr. Behrens was able to do most of it openly in his workshop. There were technical difficulties.

"Remember," Colonel Mulbach had said, "what you devise must be silent, and it must not be too heavy. The satchel will be carried to the plane by Major Mendel, but it will have to be handed over there to one of the crew, and he must not have his suspicions aroused."

Mr. Behrens abandoned any idea of using a clockwork fuse. Instead he arranged two wires of identical thickness running through glass tubes into which acid was injected when the fuse was set. When the wire was finally eaten through, it released a plunger, which detonated the main charge of polar ammonite. If one failed for any reason, the other would do the job.

The whole apparatus had then to be carefully fitted into the bottom of a satchel, which was smuggled in to him by the Colonel, and covered by a closely-fitting sheet of coloured wood. The activating switch was underneath the handle of the bag.

During all this time, Mr. Behrens, mindful of the eyes that missed nothing, continued his normal routine of visits to the front line. It was on his return from one of these that he noticed that something odd was happening. Colonel Mulbach's driver, Lorenz, said, "It is true. The soldiers are going out and the SS are coming in." Mulbach confirmed this late that evening.

He said, "All three of the regular battalions which have been doing camp and headquarters duties are being sent up into the line. They are being replaced by *Waffen SS*. It is represented as a normal redeployment for the coming offensive."

The two men looked at each other.

"It *could* be no more than that," said Mr. Behrens.

"Or it could be the normal precautions which are always taken when Hitler visits his loyal troops," said the Colonel, "but if so, it is in this case being carried to an unprecedented extreme. By an order posted this morning, command of the whole headquarters area, including both airfields, has been transferred to SS General Pohl."

"You mean that Busche has been superseded?"

"Not superseded. He remains in command of the army group, but during the period of the Fuehrer's visit, the troops in this area are not his troops and are not under his command."

"When is Hitler arriving?"

"According to present information he lands at Airfield South on Sunday afternoon."

In fact, Hitler landed at Airfield North at midday on Monday. At six o'clock that evening a Berlin acquaintance reappeared. It was SS *Obersturmfuehrer* Mailler. He shook hands with Mr. Behrens and said, "I have orders to bring you to Headquarters. A historic privilege awaits you."

In an ante-room in the headquarters building, Mr. Behrens was subjected to a polite but extremely thorough and professional search. A small pair of folding nail-scissors was removed from him, with apologies, and he was conducted to a further room. This was crowded with high-ranking officers of the Army and Air Force, most of whom he had never seen before. They were standing about in groups talking softly.

"You must be nervous," said Mailler.

"I'll try not to be," said Mr. Behrens.

Thirty minutes later a stout major opened the far door and beckoned to Mailler, who laid one hand on Mr. Behrens' arm and propelled him forward.

A man of middle height and thick build, wearing a grey uniform jacket and black riding breeches, was standing behind a table looking down at the maps on it. There were other men in the room too, but Mr. Behrens had eyes only for one. The flat-tipped nose and porcine nostrils with the spout of black hair below them; the grey face and pouches of grey skin below the eyes; the eyes black and very small, tiny windows into the furnace inside.

The revulsion was so strong in him that Mr. Behrens felt his mouth dry up. Hitler lifted his lips in a brief smile.

"He is speechless. No harm in that. In the Reich, deeds come before words."

He half turned, and one of the staff officers handed him an open box. Hitler took out the small gun-metal cross, leaned forward across the table and pinned it to Mr. Behrens' coat.

Mr. Behrens had the presence of mind to throw up his arm in a Nazi salute. The next moment he was outside in the ante-room and Mailler was shaking him by the hand.

"A remarkable privilege," he said, "that he should pin it on you with his own hand." The medal was slightly askew. "You must never move it."

"It shall stay just where it is," said Mr. Behrens fervently, "until I finally take this uniform off."

Later he was able to examine his award more closely. It was the *Dresdner Kreuz* with crossed palm-leaves. The inscription underneath said "For Arduous and Faithful Service in the Cause of Right and Progress."

THE convoy drove slowly out towards Airfield North. The Fuehrer's car, flying his personal standard, lay second in line behind the leading vehicle, which was crammed with guards, and a protective screen of motor cyclists. Third in line came SS General Pohl; behind him General Busche, with his personal staff officers, Major Nachtigal and Captain Heimroth; then a second car load of SS, and a sixth car carrying Colonel Mulbach, Major Mendel and Mr. Behrens. A seventh car, full of guards, brought up the rear.

Mr. Behrens was not happy. Mulbach was sitting in front beside the SS driver and Behrens could see nothing but the colonel's bull-neck and massive shoulders. Major Mendel was in the back, beside him. Mendel had not spoken a word since the drive started. He looked a most unreliable conspirator. He was white and sweating, breathing quickly and unable to control his hands. "Good God," thought Mr. Behrens. "Why did we have to choose a man like this? A child could see that he's up to no good. He'll fall flat on his face before he gets halfway to the aeroplane."

A thought struck him. Had Major Mendel, not trusting himself to do it unobtrusively on the airfield under the eyes of the guards, already set the fuse, and was he now afraid that some unexpected delay might keep them hanging about for an hour before take-off? It would certainly account for his nervousness.

Mr. Behrens bent his head to look at the satchel which stood on the floor between them. It was then that the full shock hit him. *It was not the satchel he had prepared.*

It was very like it but it was not the same. He had worked on it too long to be deceived. The stitching was different and the colour was a shade lighter.

As he thought wildly, turning over various permutations of treachery in his mind, the car swung to the right, over a dry ditch and on to the perimeter of the airfield.

The driver jammed on his brakes so hard that the car behind them nearly ran into them. He shouted something and pointed out of the car window, as a pandemonium of noise erupted.

Six Russian fighter planes, coming low out of the sun, dived at the convoy, their cannons blazing.

Mr. Behrens jerked the nearside door open and rolled into the ditch. The driver landed on top of him. Round the airstrip, after a moment of paralysed silence, the German anti-aircraft guns opened up, but they were firing into an empty sky. The six planes, hedgehopping, had swung right with the precision of well-trained chorus girls and disappeared in the direction of their own lines.

In thirty seconds it was all over. As the firing died away, Mr. Behrens cautiously raised his head.

Most of the occupants of the rear three cars had reached the ditch. The people in the front four cars, having nowhere to go, had either jumped out on the far side of the cars and lain flat, or had simply stayed put. Most of the actual casualties had occurred in the thick lines of black-shirted troops surrounding the perimeter, and field ambulances were already on the move.

Major Mulbach was standing beside their car. He pointed. Whatever Major Mendel's troubles had been, they were over. He was sprawled across the back seat. A bullet had gone through the back of his skull. The satchel was still on the floor of the car. The Major's blood was dripping on to it from a pool which had formed on the edge of the seat.

Mr. Behrens took the satchel, feeling as he did so for the catch under the handle. His guess had been wrong. His fingers found the catch, and it was not yet set.

Footsteps approached the car. Mr. Behrens looked up and saw an SS colonel, unknown to him, approaching. The colonel took a quick disinterested look at Major Mendel, took the satchel, swung on his heel and walked back towards the head of the convoy where interest seemed to be centring round the front two cars. Mr. Behrens followed cautiously.

Every instinct told him that something had gone badly wrong

and that he ought to keep clear. It was professional pride alone which took him forward.

A dozen Russian bullets had whipped through the back of Hitler's car, apparently without hitting anyone. The car itself was empty. Of Hitler there was no sign at all.

In front of the car stood SS General Pohl, squat and self-possessed, backed by a semi-circle of staff officers and guards. General Busche had got out of his car and was approaching with Major Nachtigal on one side and Captain Heimroth on the other. Approaching was the wrong word. They were being driven forward by SS guards behind them.

The scene reminded Mr. Behrens of something, but for a second he could not put his finger on it. Then everything clicked into place. What he was witnessing was a field court-martial.

General Pohl said, "As you observe, General Busche, the Fuehrer changed his plans at the last moment. He decided to leave from Airfield South, and should by now—" Pohl made play of consulting his watch "—be well on his way back to Rastenburg."

General Busche examined the bullet-riddled car and said, "It was fortunate for him that he changed his mind."

"Very fortunate, and a demonstration that Providence intends that he should live and fulfil his glorious destiny. Yes?"

"No doubt about it," said General Busche.

"He instructs me, however, to add," said General Pohl, and the sneer in his voice was no longer concealed, "that the bag of despatches which was to have been placed in his plane, is of such importance that he insists they be taken to Rastenburg at once."

"I see."

"And since there are a number of matters, General Busche, urgent and important matters, which he desires to discuss with you, he has decided that you should yourself fly back to Rastenburg with the despatches. Major Nachtigal and Captain Heimroth will accompany you. The plane will be flown by Luftwaffe Major Lecke. He is already at the controls."

Pohl indicated the Junkers 52 standing on the airstrip. He added, "You will be in no danger *from the Russians,* General. A fighter escort will accompany you for the first hour of your flight. After that you should be in need of no further assistance."

There was a long silence. Then General Pohl said, in tones of elaborate surprise, "You are not hesitating, General, to obey the direct orders of our Fuehrer?"

General Busche glanced for a moment at the group which surrounded him; at the massed ranks of the SS beyond, and up

at the clear sky above him. Then he gestured to Heimroth and Nachtigal and they walked forward and climbed into the plane. The SS Colonel followed him and handed in the blood-stained satchel. The door shut, the props turned, the Junkers 52 taxied down the runway and took off into the light breeze, turned slowly and headed west. From the nearby Luftwaffe airfield came the roar of the fighters as they followed the Junkers 52 up into the air. The men on the ground watched as the planes flew steadily westward, diminished in size, became specks in the deep blue Russian sky, and disappeared at last.

MR. BEHRENS remembered little of the drive back to headquarters, or of the rest of that day. No-one took any particular interest in him and he was not sure whether this was a good sign or a bad one. After dark that evening there was a quiet knock on his door. He opened it with one hand deep in his jacket pocket. Colonel Mulbach came in, walking softly like a doctor visiting a very sick man, and closed the door carefully behind him.

Mr. Behrens went to the cupboard and took out a bottle of schnapps and two glasses and brought them across to the stove. He said, "What went wrong? Or don't you know? And what is going to happen next? Or don't you know that either?"

"What went wrong," said Mulbach, "is that Major Mendel changed his mind. He decided that Hitler's daemon would preserve him, just as it has in the past, in many such attempts, and that the SS would prevail over the army. Having come to this conclusion he behaved perfectly logically. He went to General Pohl and exposed the whole plot to him."

"The whole of it? You and me as well?"

"Rest assured that he did not mention you or me. If he had done so we should not still have our teeth and fingernails." Mulbach poured the schnapps down his throat with a quick twist of his wrist and held the glass out to be refilled. "He told what he knew. No more. That General Busche and his three staff officers were planning to kill the Fuehrer with a bomb which he, Mendel, was to place on the plane. The satchel was to be given him by General Busche personally. He knew no more. Whereupon Pohl —he is an able man; now that Heydrich has gone he might aspire one day to Himmler's job—Pohl devised the pantomime you saw this morning. It would have been too great a shock to morale if a popular commander like Busche had been relieved of his command and placed under arrest on the very eve of the

offensive. So he and his three fellow conspirators were offered an easy alternative to the Gestapo torture cells and death on the hooks. A clean and sudden death in the air."

"It wasn't the bomb I made," said Mr. Behrens. "I noticed that in the car."

"It was a replica. They would keep the original for examination."

"But since it wasn't mine they'd have no means of knowing when it was going to explode. It might have been half an hour. It might have been three hours."

"That was why they threw it out of the plane soon after they were airborne. They had no desire to sit about waiting for death. They then flew the plane straight into the ground."

Mr. Behrens poured himself out a second glass of schnapps, rotated it slowly in the crimson glow from the stove and said, "How on earth do you know all this? About Mendel, I mean, and the SS counterplan, and that sort of thing?"

"General Pohl told me. I am his confidant, naturally. I arrange his communications with the Russians. He does not know that I had any connection with the bomb plot. I think the only man who may dimly have suspected that particular tie-up was our late friend, Major Mendel."

"I suppose that was why you shot him?"

"You saw me?"

"I saw nothing. I was too busy rolling into the ditch like everyone else, but I noticed that the bullet had gone through the back of his neck and come out at the top of his head. It seemed an odd sort of trajectory for a bullet fired from an aircraft. Incidentally, you were very lucky that the raid gave you the opportunity to do it."

"I arranged it on the wireless last night."

"Good God!" Mr. Behrens swallowed his schnapps. "Wasn't that rather dangerous?"

"Not so dangerous as leaving Mendel alive."

"I suppose not. What happens now?"

"What will happen next is that the team of experts who are being specially flown here from Berlin will examine the real bomb. They will do their work with great thoroughness. Each piece of material used in it will be subjected to microscopic analysis. Sooner or later they will conclude, without doubt, that it must have been made in your workshop."

"And then?" said Mr. Behrens.

"You are a very brave man," said Colonel Mulbach, "but are you sure that under the *special* methods of interrogation which

they will surely employ, you might not weaken and implicate *me*?"

"A remedy has been provided for that."

"A cyanide pill? But that is a defeatist solution."

"Can you think of any other?"

"Certainly. I have arranged to have you captured by the Russians. I think that will be the best way of ensuring your safety."

"But what about you?"

"Oh, I have been very discreet," said Colonel Mulbach. "You will have noticed that my visits to you have been made after dark. My driver, Lorenz, knows of them, of course. I think you had better take him with you."

"I think you'd better come too."

Colonel Mulbach considered the matter, then he said, "No. With Mendel gone and Pohl perforce on my side, I shall be safe enough. The game is not yet over. I'll stay and see it out."

"You're a braver man than I," said Mr. Behrens.

The commander of the tank squadron looked doubtful. He said, "That village is almost no-man's-land, Dr. Brancos. Could you not get observation from here?"

"Of a sort," said Mr. Behrens, "but not flank observation."

"Then I shall have to send a troop to protect you. And for that I should have to have instructions from higher up. In view of the coming offensive we have been particularly ordered not to take risks with our tanks."

"That I appreciate, but there is nothing to prevent me going forward on foot. My driver can carry the wire and telephone. Your signaller will pay out the reel carefully and stand by to take down my messages at this end. You will be in no danger."

"I was not thinking of the danger," said the officer stiffly, "but of my orders. However, if you insist on risking your own life, that is entirely a matter for you."

He watched Mr. Behrens and his driver crawl forward up a ditch, reappear briefly at the far end and finally disappear into the rubble of what had once been a Russian village.

The wire on the reel snaked out steadily. The signaller, who was watching it, said, "He is going very far forward. He is a brave man."

"He is a bloody fool," said the officer.

From the far side of the village came a shot, more shots, then the beat of a heavy Russian machine gun.

The officer swore. "Now we shall have to try to rescue him," he said, "and we'll lose a couple of tanks in doing it."

In fact, he ran into a very carefully prepared ambush and lost six.

Two hours later Mr. Behrens was seated in the headquarters of the 143rd Russian Infantry Assault Brigade. His knowledge of Russian was sufficient to enable him to carry on a limited conversation with the youthful Brigadier and his much older Brigade Intelligence Officer who had turned out, disconcertingly, to be a woman.

"We have informed Moscow of your arrival," said the Brigadier, "and they will be sending a plane for you tomorrow. Meanwhile, we have been told to make you as comfortable as possible. We are a little primitive here, I am afraid."

"It looks just like home to me," said Mr. Behrens.

The woman, who held the rank of major, said something and the Brigadier smiled. He said, "Yes. Play it back to us on the loud-speaker." And to Mr. Behrens, "You will be interested in a message we monitored and recorded this morning. It appears to have originated from an aircraft radio."

The loud-speaker in the corner clicked and cleared its throat; and then, out of the ether, General Busche spoke.

"With only a few minutes to live," he said, "I should like to speak to anyone who can hear me. Our country is in great peril. Unless we can come to our senses, awake out of sleep and throw off the gang of criminals and perverts, headed by the maniac who calls himself our Fuehrer—"

Here the message got buried in an outburst of static. "They are trying to jam the wavelength," said the major.

Then, for a moment, the interference died down and Mr. Behrens heard General Busche say, "I, who am about to die, salute you, my country. You will survive this foul tyranny and you will rise again, purer, stronger and greater."

Dominating the sound track now was the aeroplane note of the engine as it went into a power dive, a high shuddering scream of ill-treated machinery, rising to a crescendo. Then, at the last moment, silence.

The major got up and switched off the loud-speaker. "You don't hear the actual crash," she said. "The transmitter must have disintegrated at the moment when the plane hit the hill side."

Mr. Behrens was not interested in these technicalities. He was thinking, "One warring god gone to Valhalla. How long before the others join him, and peace comes back into this grey, embattled world?"

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Difficulty with a Bouquet

SEAL, walking through his garden, said suddenly to himself, "I would like to pick some flowers and take them to Miss D."

The afternoon was light and warm. Tall chestnuts fanned themselves in a pleasant breeze. Among the hollyhocks there was a good humming as the bees tumbled from flower to flower. Seal wore an open shirt. He felt fresh and fine, with the air swimming coolly under his shirt and around his ribs. The summer's afternoon was free. Nothing pressed him. It was a time when some simple, disinterested impulse might well flourish.

Seal felt a great joy in the flowers around him and from this a brilliant longing to give: He wished to give quite inside himself, uncritically, without thinking for a moment: "Here am I, Seal, wishing something." Seal merely wanted to give some of his flowers to a fellow being. It had happened that Miss D. was the first person to come to mind. He was in no way attached to Miss D. He knew her slightly, as a plain, elderly girl of about twenty who had come to live in the flats opposite his garden. If Seal had ever thought about Miss D. at all, it was because he disliked the way she walked. She walked stiffly, sailing with her long body while her little legs raced to catch up with it. But he was not thinking of this now. Just by chance he had glimpsed the block of flats as he had stooped to pick a flower. The flats had presented the image of Miss D. to his mind.

Seal chose common, ordinary flowers. As the stems broke he whistled between his teeth. He had chosen these ordinary flowers because they were the nearest to hand; in the second place, because they were fresh and full of life. They were neither rare nor costly. They were pleasant, fresh, unassuming flowers.

With the flowers in his hand, Seal walked contentedly from his garden and set foot on the asphalt pavement that led to the block of flats across the way. But as his foot touched the asphalt, as the sly glare of an old man fixed his eye for the moment of its passing, as the traffic asserted itself, certain misgivings began to freeze his impromptu joy. "Good heavens," he suddenly thought, "what am I doing?" He stepped outside himself and saw Seal carrying a bunch of cheap flowers to Miss D. in the flats across the way.

A CLASSIC OF THE BITTER-SWEET
BY WILLIAM SANSOM

"These are cheap flowers," he thought. "This is a sudden gift. I shall smile as I hand them to her. We shall both know that there is no ulterior reason for the gift and thus the whole action will smack of goodness—of goodness and simple brotherhood. And somehow . . . for that reason this gesture of mine will appear to be the most calculated pose of all. Such a simple gesture is improbable. The improbable is to be suspected. My gift will certainly be regarded as an affectation.

"Oh, if only I had some reason—aggrandisement, financial gain, seduction—any of the accepted motives that would return my flowers to social favour. But no—I have none of these in me. I only wish to give and to receive nothing in return."

As he walked on, Seal could see himself bowing and smiling. He saw himself smile too broadly as he apologised by exaggeration for his good action. His neck flinched with disgust as he saw himself assume the old bravados. He could see the mocking smile of recognition on the face of Miss D.

Seal dropped the flowers into the gutter and walked slowly back to his garden.

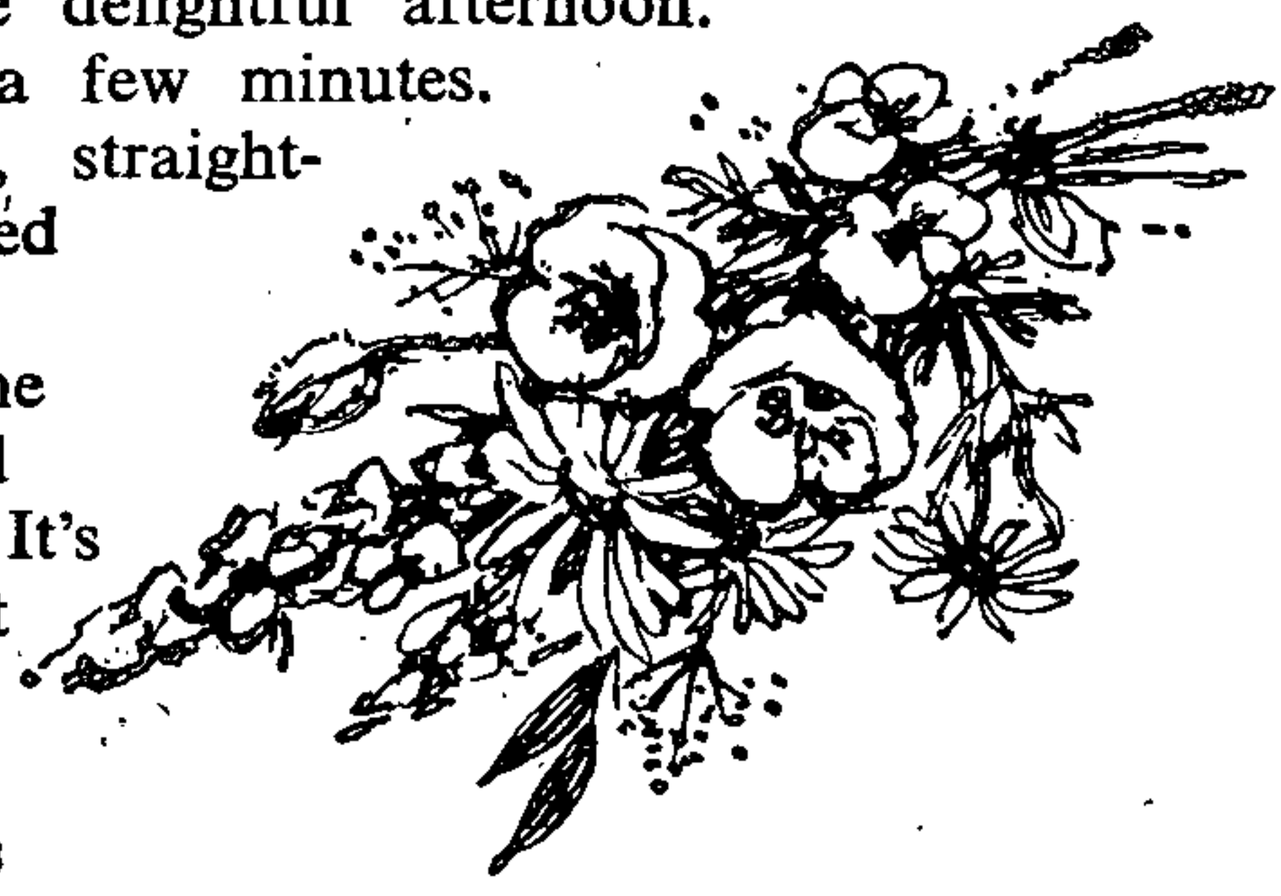
From her window high up in the concrete flats, Miss D. watched Seal drop the flowers. How fresh they looked! How they would have livened her barren room!

"Wouldn't it have been nice," thought Miss D., "if that Mr. Seal had been bringing me that pretty bouquet of flowers! Wouldn't it have been nice if he had picked them in his own garden and—well, just brought them along, quite casually, and made me a present of the delightful afternoon."

Miss D. dreamed on for a few minutes.

Then she frowned, rose, straightened her suspender belt, hurried into the kitchen.

"Thank God he didn't," she sighed to herself. "I should have been most embarrassed. It's not as if he wanted me. It would have been just too maudlin for words."



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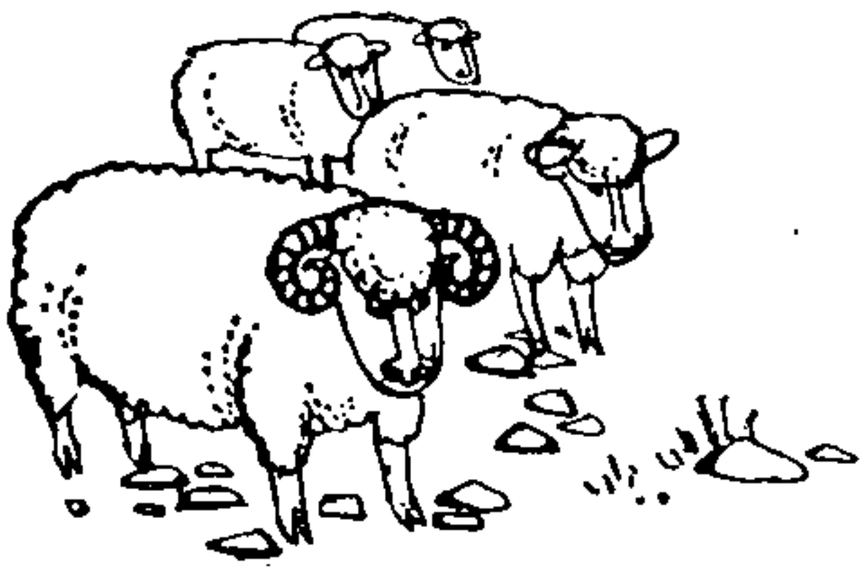


Home on the Range

BY E. L. MALPASS

EYED the stranger askance, those mountain sheep did. But then, not accustomed to bowler hats, briefcases, and rolled umbrellas were they, the poor dears.

The stranger eyed the sheep askance, too. Some of them wore horns and a sardonic expression. Rams, he thought. He gripped his umbrella like a rapier, and set his eyes on his goal, the distant chimneys of Pen y Graig farm, just visible over the next hill.

They say that, to a man in prison, thinking of his life outside is like remembering a beautiful dream. And that is how, at this moment, London appeared to Charles Fortescue. Dear, safe Piccadilly. Cosy, homely Leicester Square, with not a sheep in sight. If only he'd kept his mouth shut when the Chief had said, "Now then. Any of you gentlemen got any Welsh blood?" Then he'd still have been in a nice, centrally-heated office surrounded by miles and miles of buildings and pavements; instead of plodding through this tumble of hostile hills.

But no. "Actually, sir, my maternal grandmother was a Llewellyn. One of the Caernarvonshire Llewellyns," he had not been able to resist adding.

The Chief had rubbed his hands. "The very man I'm looking for. Come to my office, Fortescue." And then: "Sit down, my boy. Now then. Got a job for you. I want you to go and break it to one of these Taffy farmers that we intend to submerge his farm to provide water for the thirsty multitudes of Birmingham."

Charles Fortescue rose to his feet in horror. For a moment his Welsh grandmother was in control, and he was about to expostulate long and loudly. But then his English breeding told, as it always will. "He—he's not going to be terribly pleased, sir."

The Chief, with his wide mouth, heavy jowl, and thick glasses,

looked like a friendly toad. "Well, of course, that's up to you, Fortescue. Chat him up. Point out the benefits of the scheme."

"Benefits for whom, sir?"

"Why, for the four million people of Birmingham, of course."

Charles could see a flaw in this argument. "He may not be terribly interested in the people of Birmingham, sir."

The Chief was beginning to look like a rather irritated toad. "Really, Fortescue, you've got a very poor opinion of human nature. No-one's going to set his own interests before that of *four million* of his fellow creatures. Come, come, my dear fellow, people aren't *quite* as selfish as that." He became businesslike. "Now, Miss Johnson will give you all the details."

"Yes, sir," said Charles Fortescue miserably. He went to the door. "Er, Fortescue," said the Chief.

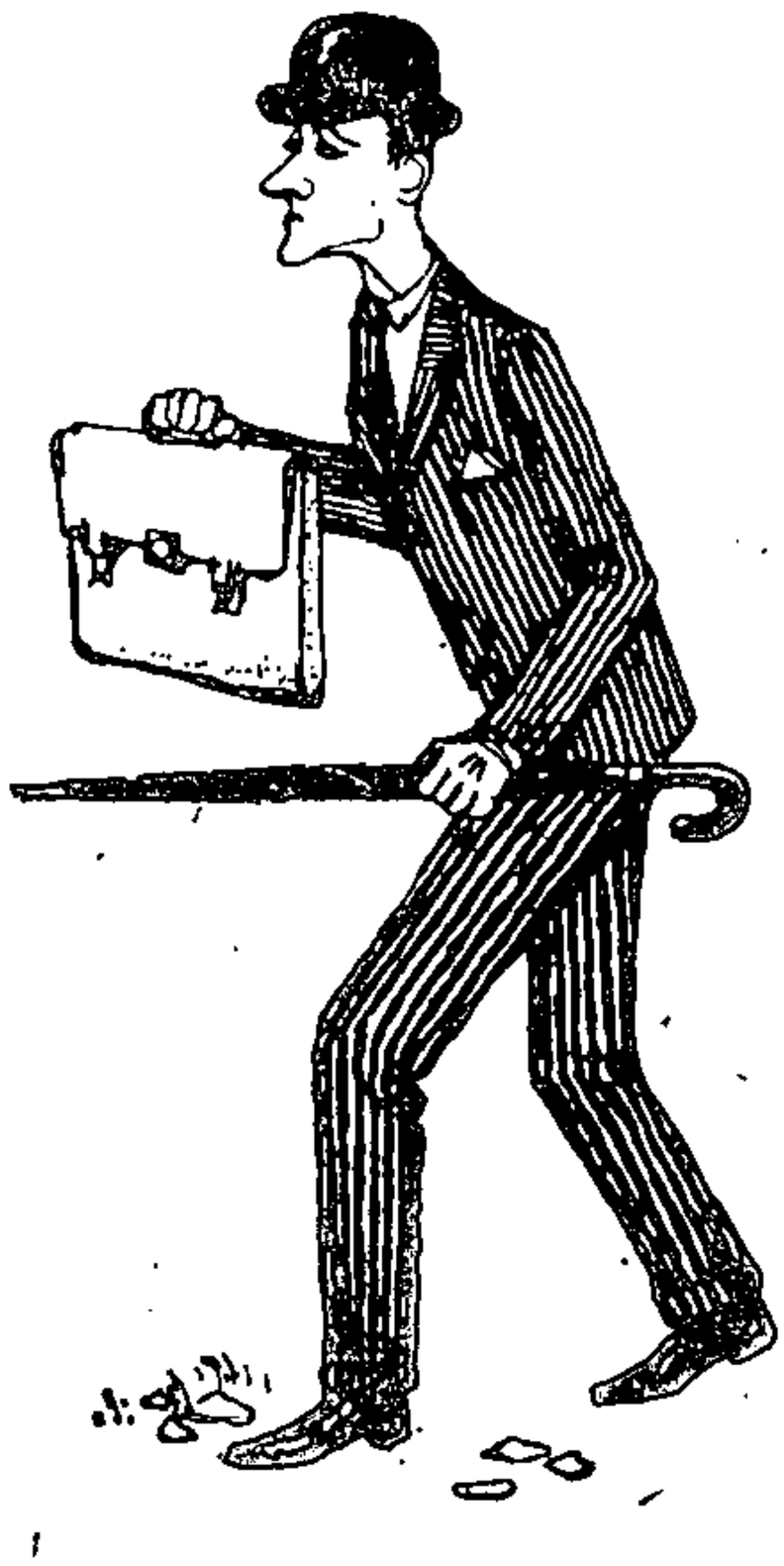
"Sir?"

"One word of comfort." He gave his subordinate an understanding smile. "A shotgun, remember, is lethal to humans only at fairly close range."

"Yes, sir," said Charles. "Thank you, sir."

There hadn't been a taxi at Dinas Junction. But very reassuring, Mog the Luggage had been. "Pen y Craig farm? Oh, lucky you are, boyo. Excellent bus service. Every three hours from the Market. Ask Evans to put you down at The Four Crosses. Only a stone's throw from there."

"And how far," asked Charles,



The man from Whitehall found an unexpected welcome in the valley; but there was to be a rude awakening . . .

Illustrations by Joy Funnell

"would you call a stone's throw?"

"Oh, two miles at the most. Do you the world of good, after being cooped up in the metropolis, isn't it?"

The farm kitchen was large, stone-flagged, and bare. In fact the only article of furniture that Charles even noticed was the shotgun propped in the corner.

And his welcome was as austere as the furnishings. "Come about the rates is it?" demanded Trevor Roberts, glaring at him across the kitchen table.

"Er, not exactly," replied Charles. Unnerving, he found Mr. Roberts. Gum boots, trousers supported by string, a collarless, flannelette shirt, a jaw like a stubbled cornfield, a grey tousle of hair. But it was the eyes that were the most alarming. They were not the eyes of a man who would weep for the people of Birmingham. In fact, judging by their independent action, Mr. Fortescue was pretty certain that one of them was of glass. But, by damn, he wouldn't have liked to say which of them it was.

He swallowed again. "Actually, sir, we should like permission to build a reservoir in this valley."

There was a silence. Then: "Inundation, is it?" growled Trevor Roberts. His eyes bored into Charles' very soul. "And on whose behalf?"

"The Corporation of Birmingham," said Charles. He went on hurriedly, "The farmhouse and outbuildings will be untouched. They are twenty feet above the proposed water level."

"Well, there is considerate," said Trevor Roberts.

Charles opened his briefcase. "I have the compensation figure here, sir."

The farmer looked at it. "What's that?" he said. "Payment for a week's camping?"

"It's a very generous figure, sir."

The farmer stroked his chin. He picked up the Englishman's umbrella, carried it across the kitchen, propped it up beside the shotgun. He came back, still stroking his chin, making a noise like sandpaper. He stood musing. Then, at last: "Well, mustn't stand in the way of progress. When you want to start?"

Fortescue felt like a man who has flung himself bodily at what

he thought was a locked door, only to find that it wasn't. "You —you mean you'll sell, sir?" he asked eagerly. "I say, the people of Birmingham are certainly going to be pleased."

"Well, there is gratifying," said Trevor Roberts.

Charles Fortescue could hardly believe his good fortune. It had all been too easy. "Too easy?" whispered a nasty, suspicious little voice somewhere at the back of his mind. He told it to be quiet. But it had sown a seed. "You—you do own all the valley, sir?" he asked anxiously.

"Every inch," said Trevor, planking down on the table two tin mugs and a bottle of whisky. He began to pour. He stopped. "No. Mistaken, I am. Sold one field to my nephew Cledwyn. Only a small one, though. Five acres of dock and nettle. No use to man or beast."

Charles' heart sank. But he said hopefully, "I should think in that case he'd be only too pleased to sell."

"Yes, indeed. Always eager to help others, that Cledwyn."

"Well, that's a relief," said Charles. "Can you—can you tell me where to get in touch with him, Mr. Roberts?"

The farmer pursed his lips. "Hard to say, man. Out in the wilds, he is."

Charles peered out of the unwashed window. Mile after mile of hill, and moor, and marsh. He didn't relish going out there to find nephew Cledwyn. But then he had a comforting thought. "I suppose he goes home to sleep?"

"Not from where he is, boyo."

Charles Fortescue felt as though a great gulf were opening before his feet. "Where—where is he?" he asked anxiously.

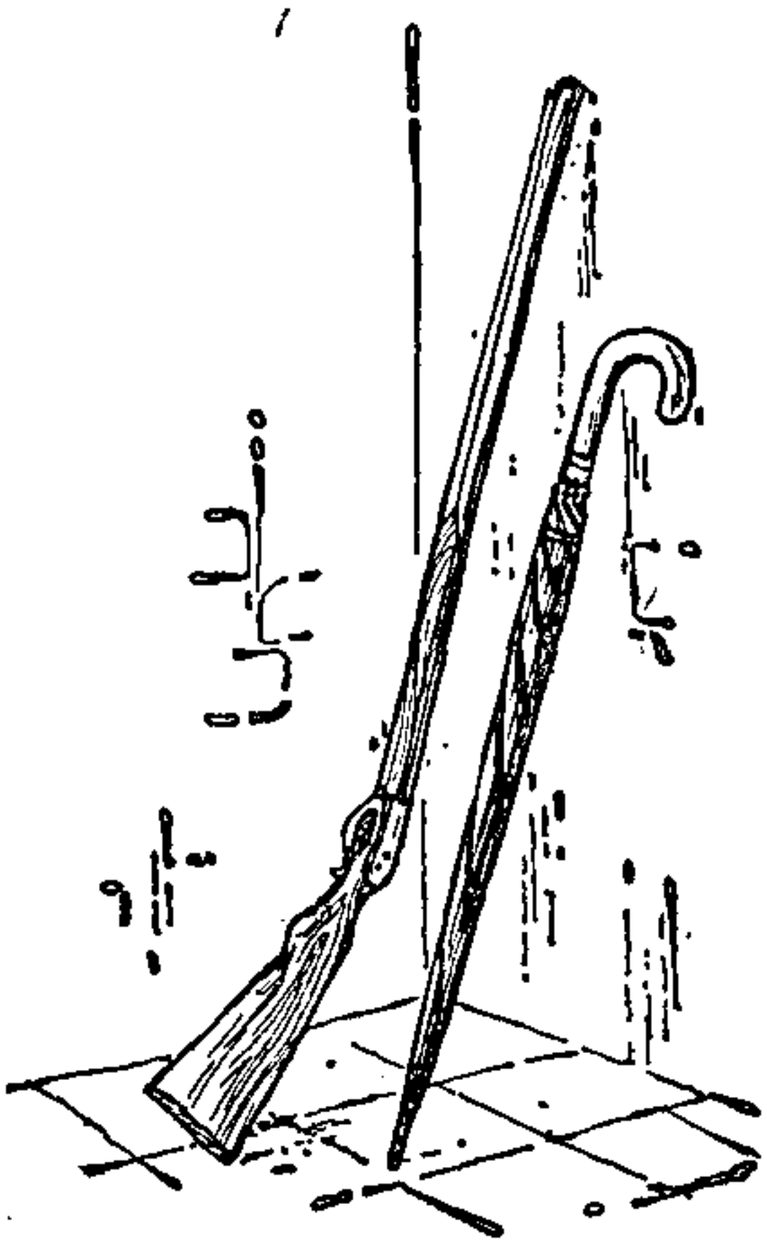
Mr. Roberts had produced a vicious-looking pipe and a screw of newspaper. He began slicing a black plug of tobacco. "Last I heard," he said thoughtfully, "it was the upper reaches of the Amazon."

Charles lifted his tin mug with a shaking hand. He took a long swig. "But it might take months."

Mr. Roberts nodded. "Have to post his Christmas card in July," he said. He replenished his visitor's mug.

Charles said, "I suppose he comes home on leave occasionally?"

"Not Cledwyn. Too damn dedicated."



"Is he a missionary?" Charles had a ray of hope. A missionary would have a base, presumably, and would be accessible, at least eventually. But Trevor Roberts dashed away that cup of hope even before it had touched his lips.

"A missionary? Cledwyn?" He actually laughed. "No. Cledwyn supplies the simple natives with anything they need. Whisky, guns, knives, cigarettes, all the blessings of civilisation. But not Bibles. Has a weakness for a fifty per cent profit, has Cledwyn."

Mr. Fortescue had a very un-English desire to bang his head against a wall and howl like a dog. It was too frustrating. The entire valley was his—all except for five miserable acres. And who had to own those? Why, some eager beaver who was too busy flogging firewater to Amazonians to return to the land of his fathers, even for a weekend.

But once again Trevor Roberts surprised him. "Tell you what," he said. "Get his latest address from his mother, I will, and write and put him in the picture."

"Well, that's awfully good of you," said Charles gratefully. "And perhaps, if you would be good enough to let me have your nephew's address, I too could write." He gave his card to the old man. He shook an earthy paw, collected his umbrella somewhat nervously from shotgun corner, and said, "Thank you, Mr. Roberts. You will be hearing from us, of course."

He departed, walking on air. How easy it was, he thought, to misjudge people when their upbringing was different from one's own. That old man, for instance. Hard, cantankerous, grasping, Charles had thought him at first sight. And how wrong he had been. No-one, no-one could have been more helpful and co-operative. True, his manner lacked the polished ease of the diplomat.

But he was none the worse for that. Beneath that rough, gruff exterior there beat a heart of gold.

And it must be admitted that that heart of gold was beating a little faster than usual as the old gentleman produced a sheet of writing paper and a stub of pencil and wrote, *Dear Nephew, Get home as fast as poss. No need to go to the Amazon to look for simple natives. Got one on the doorstep, we have ...*

Well, there is a change of scenery. Where once was a wild, and tumbled valley, there is now a bland and smiling lake, with a thousand wavelets dancing and sparkling in the sun. Where once was a bare mountainside there is a gay awning. And those old mountain sheep don't look twice now at a bowler hat. Accept it

as what the well-dressed Welsh hill farmer is wearing nowadays.

For the Pen y Graig Reservoir is being officially declared open, Mayors and Generals and Members of Parliament hob-nob together. And there, moving freely among all these Top People is Trevor Roberts. But a very different Trevor Roberts, by damn. Black serge suited, clean-shaven, his wild hair plastered down with marge, both his eyes shining with bonhomie. "Good morning, Bishop. Splendid weather the Almighty has sent for this auspicious occasion." . . . "How are you, Mr. Mayor?" . . . "Why, if it isn't Mr. Fortescue. Everything gone according to plan, is it?"

"Yes, indeed," said Mr. Fortescue. "And we are very grateful to you for your co-operation, Mr. Roberts. Not everyone would submerge his farm even for the sake of untold millions."

The farmer said modestly, "Too kind, you are, Mr. Fortescue." His eyes misted, both of them. With a dramatic gesture he swept an arm towards the lake. "This, Mr. Fortescue, will be my memorial when I am gone. And that is all I ask. The wind, sighing over the waters. The small waves lapping on the shore. Generations, yet unborn, taking a hot bath in far away Birmingham in this very water." He blew his nose. Affected himself very deeply, he had.

He had also affected Mr. Fortescue. What a dear old man, he thought. And to think I once judged him hard and grasping. Very ashamed of himself, Mr. Fortescue felt. "I am so glad you are not blind to the advantages of the project, Mr. Roberts," he said.

Mr. Roberts was silent. He just looked thoughtfully across to where his nephew Cledwyn, in charge of the tea tent, was making a clear ninety-eight per cent profit and enjoying every minute of it.

"Cup of tea and a Pen y Graig pastry, is it, Mr. Fortescue? Half a crown to you that will be, three bob to anyone else. Aesthetically rewarding the inundation has proved to be, isn't it?"

"I'm glad you think so," said Charles Fortescue, pleased and surprised. Surprised, because he hadn't expected the aesthetics of the project to appeal to Cledwyn. He thought Cledwyn verging on the material-minded. A large, florid man who looked as though he lived on prime steak and whisky, as indeed he did. A man who had demanded, and got, as much for his five acres of dock and nettle as for a building site in Mayfair.

But Charles Fortescue was realising that this was yet another man he had sorely misjudged. For Cledwyn said in a rapt voice,

"Oh, there is beautiful it will be when those conifers have grown. Soften the harsh lines of the hillside lovely, they will."

"Yes," said Charles. "They have a utilitarian purpose, as well, of course. But—I am glad you find them also beautiful."

Cledwyn did not reply. But the look he gave Charles was so sweet, so deeply spiritual, that Charles Fortescue felt quite warmed by it, as by a sun-ray lamp. And when the time came for him to leave he was still feeling uplifted. At the turn of the road he paused to take a last look at Pen y Graig Reservoir. The sun was westering, now, and the lake gleamed like cloth of gold, and the hills were etched sharp against the washed blue of the sky.

Charles, gazing, felt very proud that he had been privileged to have a hand in this transformation. What was that bit from the Messiah? "Every valley shall be exalted." Well, this one had been exalted, thanks to himself and many others. And Cledwyn had been right. Those tiny conifers would grow, line after line of them. And where once was bare hillside there would be a sweet-scented forest, sweeping nobly down to the water's edge.

The crowds had departed now. Only two men still walked by the lake. Charles recognised the white head of Trevor Roberts, the cheerful bulk of nephew Cledwyn. Good, simple men, he thought, enjoying the peace of an autumn evening. He sighed, and went his way.

"No time to waste, Uncle," Cledwyn was saying. His eyes were fixed on the lines of conifers. "Be Christmas in a couple of months."

"That's all right, boy. Sent the advertisements out yesterday, I did. Be in the posh Sundays this weekend, I reckon."

An avid reader of the Personal Columns was Mrs. Charles Fortescue. "What was the name of that man you went to see in Wales, Charles?"

"Roberts, darling."

"There's a Mr. Roberts advertising Christmas trees for sale. 'Buy Direct from the Grower.' Wouldn't it be strange if it was the same one. This is an address in Wales."

"Darling, be reasonable. Anyone who isn't called Evans is called Roberts."

"Yes, but I just thought it was strange, darling."

"Of course, dear." Mr. Fortescue got on with his crossword.

On the Twelfth Day of Christmas Trevor Roberts and nephew produced their trading figures. Net profit five hundred and

Happy as a sandboy, Cledwyn was

seventy-two pounds three shillings and fourpence. But it was not this figure that was uppermost in Trevor's mind. "Nice to think we have brought so much innocent pleasure to one thousand two hundred and forty-seven homes," he said.

But Cledwyn's mind was on other things. "What we going to do with the profit, Uncle?"

"Plough it back, boy. Boats for hire."

"Oh, no need for that nowadays. Bring their own boats, they will, and pay you well for letting them."

"Well, there is satisfactory," said the simple farmer.

But Cledwyn was already making calculations. "Now, let me see. Say ten shillings a day parking, five bob an hour on the lake, sweets for the kids, cigarettes for Dad, a gallon or two of petrol. Hot dogs at the Lido Snackery, or a slap-up lunch, with yours truly in tails, at the Lakeside Restaurant." His eyes shone with unalloyed pleasure. "Reckon we could average five pounds per family unit in the season."

"As well as providing health-giving pleasure and relaxation to thousands," pointed out his uncle piously. He reached for the whisky bottle. Solemnly nephew and uncle clinked mugs and drank to a future of cheerful, selfless service to the community.

But the best-laid schemes of mice and men, as a Scottish poet has so rightly observed, gang aft agley . . .

Spring marched into the hills with a great blustering wind; the melting snows torrented down the mountainsides; the newborn lambs lurched and shivered, and viewed this strange new

world with alarm and foreboding, as well they might. And Pen y Graig Reservoir changed from gun metal to silver, and to softest blue, and little ducks arrived from God knows where to bob and bounce among its new-grown reeds.

Happy as a sandboy, Cledwyn was. The Farmhouse Kitchen (REAL WELSH TEAS, 4/6) was complete, down to the last china dog. The Jetty Shop was stocked with every horror known to modern man, from plastic flowers to brass knick-knacks to bubble gum. The Lakeside Restaurant was discreetly elegant. The Ladies and the Gents were elegantly discreet. All they lacked now was customers.

And May would bring *them* as surely as it brought the blossom to the trees.

It did, too. And one of them, at any rate, had been there before.

Wouldn't catch Charles Fortescue spending his holidays in Wales. But there he was, driving across it to catch the boat to Ireland, when his wife said, "Darling. That signpost. Dinas. Isn't that where you went?"

"Yes," he said. "But—"

"Darling, do let's go. There's plenty of time."

Yes. There was plenty of time. And it would be rather nice to see once again the old, grey farmhouse crouched among its quiet hills, meet once more, perhaps, those simple hill folk. He backed the car to the crossroads, took the road to Dinas, and climbed the mountain track to Pen y Graig. He came, carefully, over the brow of the hill. He stopped. "God bless my soul!" said Charles Fortescue.

A pretty sight, a sight to gladden the heart of any but the most embittered. A myriad sails—blue, red, white—wove and dipped upon the waters of the lake. Lithe, sunburned bodies dived in off the top board, or belly-flopped from the side. A hundred anglers, each with one of Trevor Roberts' fishing tickets stuck in his hat-band, watched their floats in silent concentration.

"God bless my soul," Charles said again. He let in the clutch, and careered down the hill and into the Car Park (TEN SHILLINGS PER DAY OR PER PART OF PER DAY).

"You can't *do* this, Mr. Roberts," he roared at the Car Park Attendant.

Puzzled, the attendant looked. Scratched his head under his peaked cap. Then understanding dawned. "Why, Mr. Fortescue," he cried. "Come to sample the delights of the Pen y Graig Lido, is it?"

"No, it damn well isn't," shouted Charles. "You can't *do* this."

"Nothing in the bye-laws, boyo."

"There's plenty in the bye-laws."

"Didn't see it, boyo."

"Well, you read them again, dammit."

Hung his head, did Mr. Roberts. "Oh, there is ashamed I am, Mr. Fortescue. Hate to admit it, but verging on the uneducated, me. Unable to read English, see, not a damn word."

Charles, about to utter a devastating reply, suddenly caught sight of the nearby hillside. Couldn't believe his eyes. "What's happened to all those conifers?" he demanded.

"Oh, there is dreadful." Mr. Roberts raised his anguishd eyes to heaven. "Ravaged by the dreaded fir beetle, they were."

Mr. Fortescue stared. "But there isn't a stick left."

"Very destructive, the fir beetle," Mr. Roberts said.

They were halfway to Holyhead before Mrs. Fortescue said, "Darling?"

"Yes?" he said, still seething.

"Remember that advertisement in the Personal Column? For Christmas Trees?"

"Good Lord," he said. "You don't think . . .?"

They drove on. "I had a boy friend in the Forestry Commission once," she said.

"I had a girl friend in the Min. of Ag. I don't see—"

His wife said thoughtfully, "I never heard *him* mention the dreaded fir beetle."

"Good Lord," he said. "You mean he was—trying it on?"

"Not only trying," she said sweetly. "Succeeding."

A nasty thing, resentment. Takes over the mind as an aching tooth takes over the mouth. Quite spoilt Mr. Fortescue's holiday, it did. And his wife's. Bears with sore heads are not the jolliest companions.

And as soon as he was back in London he telephoned his friend Jumbo Coates at the Defence Ministry. "Jumbo? Are you still on sites for artillery ranges?"

"Why? You don't know of one?" Jumbo asked eagerly.

"The very spot."

"My dear chap," Jumbo said, deeply moved. "If you *knew* the *difficulties*. I was beginning to think the whole damned island was either National Trust or Historic Interest."

"Not this bit," said Charles. He provided details.

* * *

The boat chugged purposefully up the Amazon. But who is this old and broken man slumped in the bows of the craft, gazing out with sad, Welsh eyes at the creaming wake? It is none other than Trevor Roberts of Pen y Graig, a man aged by bitterness and sorrow before his time.

His nephew came and put an arm about those dejected shoulders.

"Home-sick is it, Uncle?" he asked understandingly.

The old man nodded. "What is it the poet says? 'Always, night and day, I hear lake water lapping with low sounds on the shore . . .'"

"To say nothing of the clatter of the one-armed bandits in the Lido Snackery," said his nephew softly.

"The click of the turnstiles at the swimming pool," said the old man. He wept openly.

The boat chugged on. "Oh, there was inconsiderate," Trevor Roberts cried. "There was inconsiderate, setting up an artillery range across our only access road. Cutting off all those people from their innocent weekend pleasures."

"Yes," agreed Cledwyn.

He tried to strike a happier note.

"All is not lost, however," he said. He pointed to the cargo.

"Fortunate we managed to pick up a few nine-inch shells. Very gratified the warring tribes will be to learn that each one of those is capable of destroying a thousand enemies."

"Not without a gun to fire them, it isn't," pointed out Uncle.

Cledwyn gazed out at the churning water. "Your native is a simple, honest fellow," he said. "By the time he has even begun to work out the mechanics of the business, we should be well up the next tributary."

Uncle did not reply. His heart was still in Wales, with his broken dreams. Oh, terrible, isn't it, when the peaceful paths of commerce are crushed by the engines of war. © E. L. Malpass 1967

BLACK CHAIN

BY DOROTHY K. HAYNES

THE island was three miles out, by the small motor boat which took trippers to look at the monastery. On a rough day the boat didn't sail. The island hid itself in a veil of spray and seemed to retreat farther into the Atlantic; but at odd times of the year, when the tides were low, the Black Chain reared up from the sea bed and linked the monastery to the mainland.

So once or twice a year it was possible to walk to the island, but local people knew the dangers and wouldn't take the risk. The half-mile of stepping stones was longer than it looked, and the chain was not easy to traverse. If a man fell, no boat could put out to rescue him until the tide turned, and if he took too long on his journey he would find the rocks suddenly submerged, and a strong current carrying him round the point.

Brother Thomas knew the tides as well as he knew his prayers. Day after day he sat in his little office waiting for the tourists to come straggling up the path: the elderly ladies, the young girls with the sunglasses, and the men in coloured shirts with their maps and cameras and binoculars. He led them over the island with his hands muffled in his robe and his feet dusty in their sandals. An hour, the tour would take. He had done it so many times that he could judge it to a second.

It was very hot. The fields rose up and up to where the monastery dominated the island, and then fell away to the sea on the far side. The sea was everywhere, reached too quickly from every direction.

"At first," said Brother Thomas, staring abstractedly at the thick bar of haze which hid the horizon, "at first you feel trapped. There is nowhere you can go to escape. And then,

gradually, you realise you're on an island, and you resign yourself."

"Personally," said a grey-haired lady, with a hearty, metallic directness, "personally, I'd get demented. But I suppose you've a sort of vocation."

He didn't answer her. The word "vocation" which the visitors always bandied about had come to set up in him a violent eruption of discontent, a feeling sour and familiar. He had battled with it for a long time before telling the dogmatic old confessor about it, and then the routine prayers had given no help.

It was worse, too, at this time of the year, when the boats came over with the visitors. There was something unsettling about them. He could never get down to work or meditation till the last load had gone and the last voice faded over the water; and even then the voices came back to him, more real sometimes than the sounds around him.

It didn't do to think about it. "Yes," he said quickly, snatching at a question with relief. His stretched arm took in the brothers dotted about the field. "Yes, we do everything ourselves. We bake our own bread, catch our own fish, preserve the eggs from our own farm—"

"I thought you did nothing but pray," said one of the slim brown girls.

"We pray the clock round. We rise at two in the morning—" He smiled at the expected gasps, the incredulous respect on their faces. "It's a hard life, but we weather it well. Two of our brothers are over ninety—this is the chapel. Each of us has his own place—" He smiled again at the old and somewhat bitter jest. "You will see that we don't go in for comfort. There's no danger of our falling asleep in these seats. There is no heating."

They shivered, thrilling at the thought of it, and the sun fell on them solidly as they left the church. Brother Thomas blinked, and there was sweat on his brow and the white circlet of his skull.

"And now," he said, leading them seaward again, with the tide falling and retreating all the time, "you're in luck today. The Black Chain's just coming into view."

They craned and jostled as he explained the phenomenon. "St. Samuel, our Founder," he said, "was the first man ever to cross the chain. His preachings had roused the mainland folk against him, for he was a plain speaker and did not spare his audience. He had to run from the mob. It was low tide, and the rocks were his only way of escape. The islanders, even then, were a different race, cut off, more gentle in their ways. They took the saint in,

and he lived among them and found followers. From them he created our Order."

There was no longer any romance in it for him, but the visitors found it thrilling, and a young man in a tartan shirt took his field glasses from their case and began to twiddle with the lenses. His lips sucked in with concentration, and a little muscle jigged in his jaw. Suddenly Brother Thomas felt an insane desire to possess the binoculars. He looked at the strait, like a blue ribbon threaded with black velvet, and the fawn-speckled rocks beyond. And then he touched the young man on the elbow, and said, "I wonder—would you mind if I had a look?"

"Oh, not at all!" The youth started, half ashamed at not having offered the glasses, and thrust them quickly into the monk's hands. Brother Thomas worked clumsily, altering the focus, and the party crowded round as if trying to share his vision.

The sea was crawling, splashing gently against the black stepping stones. In just over an hour, the tide would be at its lowest, so that if a man wanted to cross, he should start a little before. He swung from the flat shore and the cliffs to the town, pale colour-washed, and frighteningly close to a man who had not set foot on the mainland for twenty years. The only monk who left the island was the steward, who went over once in a while to order the stores the community could not produce themselves. He paid accounts, he took sick monks to hospital, and ferried visitors over for an occasional retreat; but always he came back to his prayers and his piety, and he never spoke of his privileges.

"If only I could have been the steward," thought Brother Thomas. "Even that little pleasure . . . but they live too long here." He was bitterly jealous of the steward. Sometimes he found himself quoting venomously,

Grr, there go, my heart's abhorrence . . .

"Thank you," he said, almost pushing the binoculars at the boy. "It's a bit difficult to focus, when you wear spectacles."

He stood on the little jetty, waving off his guests, and watching them pick up again their tourist jocularity. The grey-haired lady was being exaggeratedly careful about choosing her seat, and the boy with the checked shirt had hooked a girl with the strap of his binocular case. Soon, thought the monk, he would put his arm round her. He raised a hand as the boat puttered away.

Strange, he thought, how poignant it was, this farewell after an hour. In some ways, the trippers seemed more real to him than the people he lived with. He waved again; and it was then that he saw the binoculars, lying on the jetty steps where the boy had left them while he handed the girl into the boat.

He could have shouted. He could have signalled to them, held the glasses aloft, done something to attract their attention; but he let the boat go farther and farther away, till the waving stopped, and the wake had faded to nothing more than a shadow on the water; then he bent down, his hands shaking a little, and raised the glasses again to his eyes.

The boat was clear again, and the youth in the tartan shirt was whispering into the girl's ear. And beyond he could see the town. There were gulls hovering over the chimneys, and people walking on the quay. He let the binoculars dangle on their cord like the cross the Reverend Father wore on his breast. Then he turned and began to run furtively round the island.

There was no-one to see him as he hurried down to the shore. The next boat, the last one of the day, would not arrive till the turn of the tide, and he would not be missed till then. He went slithering down the grass tussocks to the broad crescent of sand, and began to make for the first stone. The cold of the water was like a shock to his feet. It swirled above his ankles, so that he had to pause for a moment to lift his habit and tighten the cord round his waist to pouch the grey material over it.

Sand silted over his toes and sucked at his sandals as he pulled them clear; and the rock, when he reached it, was warm with the sun, dried after long months of cold soaking beneath the sea. It was only a step to the next stone, and a short leap to the next one, but after that he paused, seeing the way more difficult. The rocks were farther apart than he realised, and it would take a clever man to judge each jump with no room for a take-off.

He had never been much of an athlete. Prayer, and the daily walks over the island—he looked back, a guilty glance over his shoulder, but nobody was there. The monks would all be labouring at the other side of the hill; and as he thought of it, the two steps he had traversed seemed far more of an accomplishment than the miles and miles he had walked on his religious duties. He drew back, leaped, and almost over-stepped himself. Careful now; steady. There was no time to waste, but caution would pay.

He measured the next gap, his eyes screwed shrewdly, but his knees trembling. The rock was higher this time. Wait till my nerves settle, he thought; but he could not regain confidence in himself. Time, too, was flustering him. The tide was at its lowest ebb, and soon it would be on the turn. He made three more leaps, quickly, almost carelessly, and then he had to stop. He had made the mistake of looking down at the sea.

It was not the sea itself that he feared. If the rocks had been level with the water, he would have felt as safe as a child playing

hopscotch. What frightened him was the ascending height of the black pillars, and the sheer drop to an ocean hardly moving, a heavy slow drift of indigo and silver. Sometimes there was a quick flash as a fin of rock broke the surface, and it seemed as if the rock, not the sea, was moving; the whole chain riding and gliding against the slow silken tug of the swell and the vertigo of high rocks toppling . . .

He was riding through space, the sky and the sea racing past him. This was the narrowest rock yet. There was room to stand, if he could resist the giddy swing of the sea, or room to kneel, as he was doing now, with hands clinging and head bowed, looking backwards and downwards. He raised his head quickly, away from the topsy-turvy turmoil of water. Better to sit, perhaps . . . he edged himself round, keeping his eyes steady and straight ahead. The next rock was lower, and broader. Without thinking he launched himself forward, his mind purposely blank against terror, and a long strand of seaweed squelched under his sandal and sent him sprawling on the slaty slabs. His wrists stung where they had been grazed, and his ankle was numb with pain.

"Oh, Lord," he thought, feeling the tender puffiness round the bone, "suppose I can't walk? Suppose it's broken . . ."

He tried his weight on it, and the ankle held him. It was only a strain, a slight injury which would pass after a few minutes' rest. He could do with a few minutes, anyway, to get his breath back. He touched the binoculars swinging at his waist, and their presence was a comfort to him. Moving as far as he could to the edge of the rock, he lifted them to his eyes.

He did not look at the island. It was clear, far too clear in his mind, the green fields running down almost to the water, and, dominating everything, the cross on top of the monastery. What he wanted to see was the mainland.

From where he stood, the town itself was almost out of sight, but he could see enough to tempt him: a few houses, pink and lemon washed, and a little road running uphill with a figure toiling up on a bicycle. Where the road turned to the right there was a cemetery. Fascinated, he worked at the focus till he could make out the individual stones, the birds and urns and crosses, and the chained-off lairs. It was so different from the austerity of the monks' burial place.

On one of the graves, a child was skipping, crossing her feet and singing to herself. He could not make out her face; she was too far away for that; but he watched her bounce up and down, more and more slowly as she grew breathless, and then stop as her tired feet tripped her. She swung the rope again, after a

minute, and then began skipping in a new rhythm. Suddenly, there was another child dancing with her, the two children face to face, the rope going over and over.

Blinking his eyes, for he found that the glasses strained them, the monk began to breathe the words he remembered from long ago, "I—call—in—my—sister—Betty!" He laughed, half ashamed, even in the silence. His sisters used to sing that rhyme, and he and the other boys used to tease them, throwing stones to knock them off their count. The two girls' rhythm was becoming irregular. One faltered a second later, and then they were both down, rolling and giggling and waving their legs in the air.

He swung the binoculars away, back to the road. The cyclist had dismounted, and was lounging on the verge, munching something from a paper bag. It was so free, not wicked at all, not anything to be renounced; the freedom to skip and dance, to eat and enjoy life instead of always meditating upon death.

He sat for a long time, watching the road, and seeing the traffic creep up and down, the cars and cycles, and once a bus, a green bus with yellow lettering on the back. A girl went up with a young man, both taking slow, exaggerated steps, their arms twined, their heads leaning together. The monk sighed, and looked away again. It would not do, this senseless spying and wishing. What he should do was get across, and reach the paradise he saw so clearly and tantalisingly in the little circle of glass.

As he lowered the binoculars, he felt the first cool wash of the water at his feet.

He could not believe it. He was not yet halfway across. He looked down, drawing his legs up, as if he could halt the tide by avoiding contact with it. The sea was racing swiftly, with a wicked blue and white sparkle. The only thing now was to make a run for it, and get back to the island as quickly as possible.

But he hesitated. The whole rock was submerged. He could not see the beginning or the end of it, and he was afraid to go nearer the edge. How could he jump, out of this mounting flood, without room for a take-off? The hem of his habit was wet now, heavy with water, and the curve of the current made the sea look as if it was turning, turning, with himself the hub, spinning round and round.

This was the end of it. There was time, only just enough time, to resign himself and make his peace with God. But his mind cavilled, even now, at the necessity for prayer. He had prayed so long, and to such little purpose. Surely life could not end like this, mock humility on a rock, the last minutes wasted in hypocritical repetition? He rebelled; but even then, feeling the water

at his knees, prayer was forced from him, the automatic crying of the soul in panic, the cry for life. He did not want to die; and in a few minutes more the life he had despised became desirable. If he could have got back to the monastery, he would have fallen on his knees and kissed the stones in gratitude.

But of course he would never get back. He was numbed, too numbed to think properly; too numbed now to be afraid. A listless despair and misery filled him. Why had he imagined that he could escape? Suppose he had reached the mainland, what then? What could he have done? Where could he have gone, an elderly, monkish figure, ridiculously dressed, and out of touch with the world? He was a childish man, a man entranced by the sight of two children dancing in a graveyard; a man who would be by turns prudish or sensual, unbalanced by isolation.

Oh, he got on well enough, speaking to people, shepherding them for an hour, and repeating his well-learned pieces; but to them he was something out of a picture book, picturesque, but no more real to them than the three wise men; and if he did live and work among them, how could he settle to it? He would waken in the darkness to pray, and—well, the question didn't arise now. He was going to die, and no-one would know what had happened to him. When the next boat arrived—

The next boat. It came into sight, shearing through the water, abob with heads, an arm waving, pointing out the monastery.

"Ahoy!" the monk shouted, his own arm waving, signalling wildly for help. They would not hear him, of course; and even if they did, they would not be able to help him. He raised the binoculars again, following the boat in anguish. There was a young man in a tartan shirt—the young man coming back for his binoculars.

"Here! Hoy, there! Look! Help!"

The man's face was so clear, it was inconceivable that he could not see. Brother Thomas kept the glasses trained on him, willing him to look, praying for a glance, the slightest second of recognition. It became very important that someone should know about him, even if only to shake a helpless head and wave farewell. But the youth did not look. Of course, thought Brother Thomas, he can't see without his binoculars.

It was very funny, so funny that he laughed lightheadedly. Quite ridiculous. He was laughing in great sobs as he braced his feet against the current and felt the water pulling at his shoulders; and the boat went lifting on the waves, round the corner and out of sight, taking the last load of visitors to look at the monastery.

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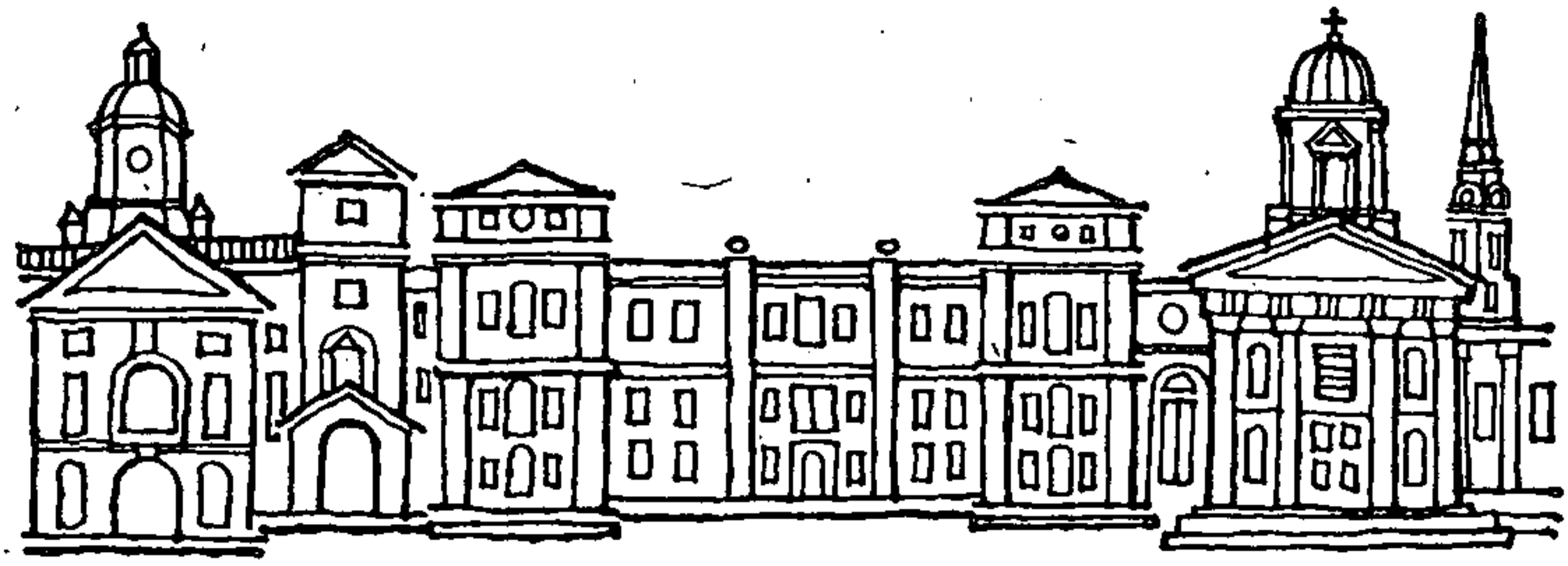
LONDON OBSERVED



London, to me, is like a woman with wet, draggled, dirty skirts . . . and at first you turn from her in disgust, but soon you discover that she has glorious eyes lighting up her pale wet face. The historic houses, such as Marlborough House, Lansdowne House, Devonshire House and Cadogan House, and a hundred others, are her eyes . . . You will find magic and mystery in her fogs, as Whistler did; and in her gardens some June morning you will wake and find her temperate warmth of desire more enchanting than any tropic heat. London draws me more than any capital, and I have been in most of them.

FRANK HARRIS, *My Life and Loves*

The rounded buses loom through softest blue,
The pavement smells of dust but of narcissus too,
The awnings stretch like petals in the sun,
And even the oldest taxis glitter as they run.

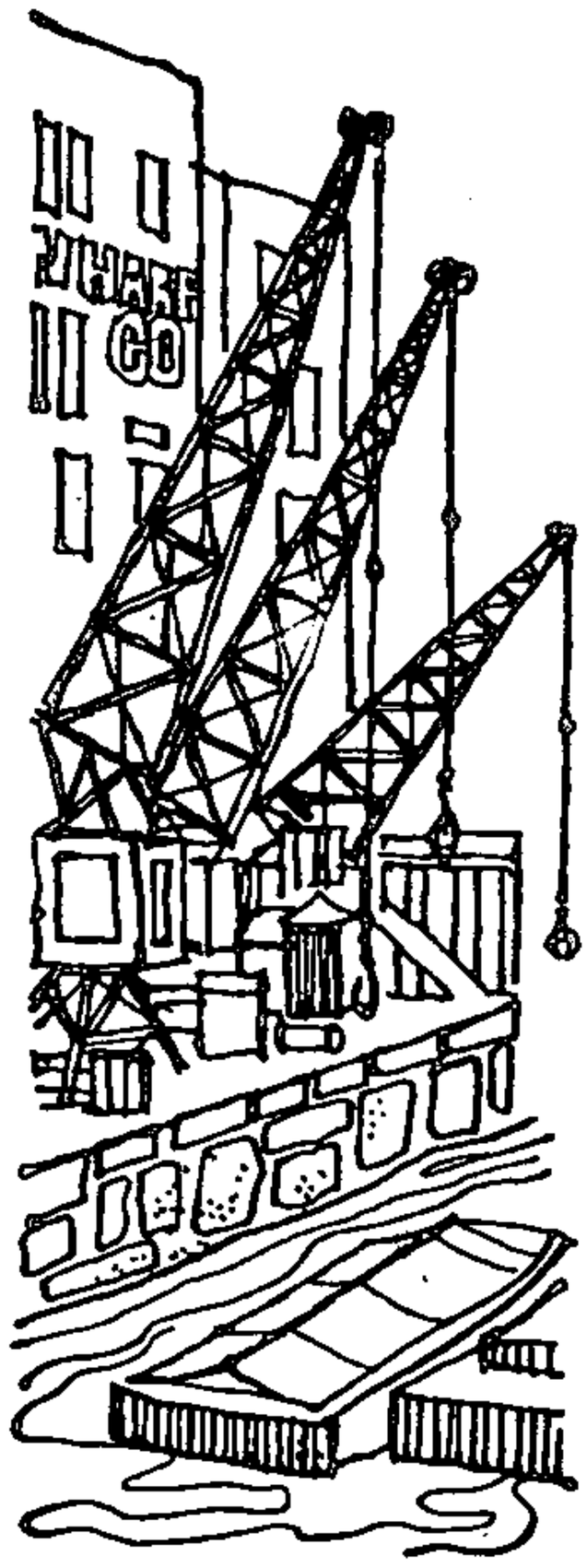
Over the sooted secret garden walls
As in another Eden cherry-blossom falls,
Lithe under shadowing lilacs steal the cats,
And even the oldest ladies tilt their summery hats.

FRANCES CORNFORD, *London Spring*

Northern Line

At Islington a fair they hold,
Where cakes and ale are to be sold.
At Highgate, and at Holloway
The like is kept here every day.
At Totnam Court and Kentish Town,
And all those places up and down.

Poor Robin's Almanack, 1676



SWEET THAMES

I took the same boat up the Thames again about two weeks later with one of the American boys. I forget just why. It was a Sunday, I think, and everything was closed. It was a hideous ride, with warehouses and smokestacks on one side of the river and Bovril and Milk advertisements on the other, but by then I wasn't particularly in the mood to get upset about the looks of a river. It had rained almost steadily since I arrived and I thought London the ugliest city on earth. Marble Arch and Piccadilly Circus. Ugh. The dirty-green patch called Leicester Square surrounded by Movie Palaces, restaurant windows full of chickens revolving on their spits and the new Automobile Association building—hardly *Art Nouveau*. Ugh. Oxford Street. Ugh, Ugh . . .

ELAINE DUNDY, *The Old Man and Me*

When melancholy Autumn comes to Wembley
And electric trains are lighted after tea,
The poplars near the Stadium are trembly
With their tap and tap and whispering to me,
Like the sound of little breakers
Spreading out along the surf-line
When the estuary's filling
With the sea.

JOHN BETJEMAN, *Harrow-on-the-Hill*

SAFETY IN NUMBERS

Johnson was much attached to London; he observed that a man in London was in less danger of falling in love indiscreetly than anywhere else; for there the difficulty of deciding between the conflicting pretensions of a vast variety of objects kept him safe.

JAMES BOSWELL, *Life of Samuel Johnson*

Nostalgia

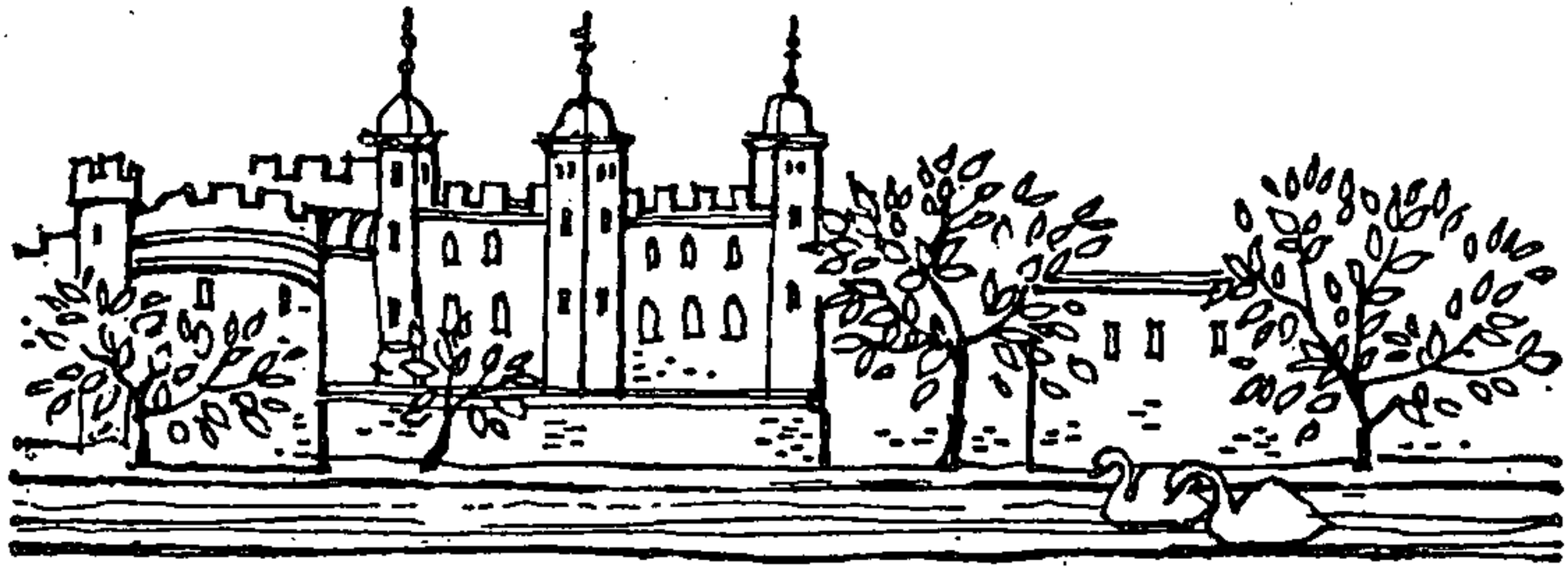
Forget six counties overhung with smoke,
Forget the snorting steam and piston stroke,
Forget the spreading of the hideous town;
Think rather of the pack-horse on the down,
And dream of London, small and white and clean,
The clear Thames bordered by its gardens green.

WILLIAM MORRIS, *The Earthly Paradise*

Tourist Attraction

I only wish that you could see for once a London day like this one; it is pouring as though the angels thought that there was a conflagration down here, and my street is enveloped in so thick a cloud of coal smoke that, in order not to harm my eyes, I am writing by the light of a candle (at half past ten in the morning); and yet at ten o'clock yesterday night it was starlight and freezing hard. One could certainly not endure it were it not for other consolations which far outweigh all that. In a word (between you and me), if it were not for the inconceivably lovely, obliging, naive creatures, ready to be helpful on every occasion, who warm one's bed, I would wager that all the Englishmen would quit England . . .

GEORG CHRISTOPH LICHTENBERG, 1770



Legacy of Love

BY JOHN CHRISTOPHER

THE cable, addressed to me, was lying on the hall table when I let myself in soon after midnight. I had had a good deal to drink, and I stared at it muzzily for some moments before ripping it open. I did not expect much of it. It could, I thought, be Gunther, who liked sending cables over trivialities—he was only mean when it came to lending money. I hoped it was not from Gunther. The cable read:

MISS CHARLES DIED TODAY FUNERAL FRIDAY
1400 TO YOUR ADVANTAGE TO ATTEND.

It was signed by someone called Schmidt.

I made nothing of it, and after I had carried it upstairs and switched on the lights in my room, I still made nothing of it. I drew the curtains on Lancaster Gate. Meant for someone else, perhaps? With a name like Harris, one became used to misdirections. And I had only been here a few weeks, as the result of an unanticipated need for retrenchment when the scheme with Villiers fell through.

That was it, I decided: there must be another Harris staying at the North Park Hotel. Then I happened to glance at it again, and saw the office of origin. It had been handed in at Montreux. I stared at my face in the mirror above the fireplace. It was for me, all right.

The thing was, I don't think I had ever seen her name written down, nor thought of her as Miss Charles. First she had been Mademoiselle Sharl, an enigmatic figure glimpsed walking by the lake, the subject, occasionally, of feverish gossip in the Prefects' Room. And then, for the last few burning weeks of the

last summer at Salagnon, incredibly, enthrallingly, she had been Tilly.

I flew to Cointrin, and hired a car from Hertz—a pale blue Opel Rekord that lacked what might be called punch but cruised very comfortably at 100 k.p.h. along the lake road. I had never flown to Switzerland before. In the old days it had always been by boat and train, with the sudden overwhelming view of water and mountains just out of Lausanne. I did not know this western end of the lake well, and I confirmed my feeling that it was not very interesting. I slowed down for the approach to Nyon, and wondered if I had been wise to come.

Funerals had always struck me as pointless barbarities, destructive of any sincerity, smearing memory with a treacle of sentimentality and boredom. I could have thought of her better in London than out here. Nor would I have felt any impropriety in refusing the request. Tilly, the Tilly I knew, would have understood.

I thought of our first meeting. She had been feeding the swans on a hot blue morning, wearing a large pink hat that shielded her face from the sun. I recognised her, and remembered what Duval had said: that she had been the mistress of dukes and arch-dukes and princes. It would be amusing to strike up conversation with her, and be able to talk about it at school.

I made some inane remark about the swans, and her blue eyes looked at me from the shadow of the hat, and she spoke seriously in her low husky voice. We chatted for ten minutes, and at the end I said I hoped we would meet again, and she nodded gravely and bade me goodbye.

I had no difficulty in finding her, because she made the same promenade each day. On the third or fourth encounter, I asked if I might walk along with her, and a few days later she asked me to have coffee with her in the Café de l'Univers, and she ordered me Florentines, which I ate with a schoolboy's appetite, relishing the combination of biscuit and candied fruit and chocolate, while she watched me, smiling. We talked about music—I was very keen on Tchaikovsky at the time—and she asked me if I would like to come to her house and hear a new record of the Sixth Symphony.

And so, the following afternoon, I went to the large quiet house which, from behind its high walls, looked out across the placid waters of the lake, and her maid, Marie, let me in, and Tilly played me gramophone records in the big drawing room where perhaps princes and arch-dukes had once gathered but

where now there were just the two of us; and Marie came to say she was going out, and Tilly explained that it was her afternoon off but she would make tea for us both.

Ten years later and driving towards her funeral, I found that I still blushed at the recollection of my young self. I was sophisticated enough, going to a continental school, to know all about rich ageing women and their penchant for lovers less than half their age. Could this be anything else but an invitation? She was attractive; each meeting had made me more aware of the charm of that still piquant face, the scented contours of her body; and I, at seventeen, was desperate for experience.

She brought the tea in, and I took her small wrists in my hands, and when she laughed I thought she was being coquettish, and tried to force her to me, to kiss her.

She released herself with a quick unexpected movement, and chided me, and I sulked, in shame and embarrassment. And then she coaxed me out of my mood, and talked about herself with a frankness that moved me.

"You are seventeen, John, and seventeen years ago I was thirty-eight and preparing my—abdication, shall we say? The stories are true enough. I had lovers, many lovers. But not for more than five years now, and never again. Look at me. I am an old woman."

I looked at her, preparing to lie, and saw there was no need. One could no more deny her age than deny her beauty. That was the moment that I fell in love with her.

It took weeks of visits, and of pleading, before she relented. That she did so was no tribute either to my physical attractions or to the quality of my pleas. She was a woman who could not bear the sight of suffering, and I imagine for that reason had cut herself off so much from the world. She could, I suppose, have put me out of mind, too, by putting me out of sight. She was weak in that, because she liked me; and perhaps by intruding on her loneliness I had made her conscious of it.

There was, of course, a certain amount of acting in my protestations—perhaps the greater part, even. Tilly understood this, but I think it only deepened her sympathy. She wanted me to be natural again, as I had been when we first met, untroubled either by real or feigned anguish. And she came to see that there was only one way that this could be brought about; and so, one afternoon when Marie was off again, visiting her aunt in Vevey, she accomplished it.

There were three weeks remaining till the end of the term, the

end of my last year at Salagnon. And I looked at her with no triumph, but great joy and a deeper love.

I spent as much time at the house with her as I could. At school, as a senior prefect, I was given a good deal of latitude. I had mentioned my first meeting with her to the other boys, but not the other meetings—in the beginning because I was ashamed of seeming to cultivate an old woman, later for quite different reasons. I walked or took the yellow trolley-bus along the front to where the tall elegant house with the blue shutters lay hidden behind its walls and trees and shrubs, and went in through the french windows, like a burglar neither feared nor fearing. She was always waiting for me.

Inevitably, when the time came I did not want to leave her. Although I was not academically inclined, I had worked for an Oxford Entrance because it was the alternative to going into the family business. Now I wanted to reject them both, reject everything that was likely to keep me from her. I would stay in Canton Vaud, I told her; get some sort of job. Anything; it did not matter. In fact, I thought that, if things came to the worst, she would look after me. I knew she was wealthy, and I would have taken money from her.

But she told me, very firmly, that I must go back, and when I threatened to defy her, to stay with or without her consent, said that it would make no difference; from the date of the last day of school she would not see me again. She spoke calmly, but implacably. In this, at least, she had made up her mind, and would not change it. I attempted, as I had done before, to use moral blackmail on her.

She smiled, and said, "Darling, I know. It is painful, and will be. But the time will come when the pains are different, and you will wish you could have this one back again."

I went, as I had to, and was unhappy, as I expected to be, and wrote letters which she did not answer. It was all very predictable. Within a few months, I was thinking of her only at intervals, and the intervals grew longer, the memories less hurtful and precise. For several years, before that cable came, I could not recall thinking of her at all.

The little church was almost empty. When she had first come to Montreux, she had been too notorious for the English colony, and though they would have come to accept her in time, as they accepted far more outrageous figures, she had been content to do without the social life they might have offered. Apart from the vicar, there were four of us present, and one was a little old lady

in black who may have been about her own separate spiritual business; she stayed in church when we left for the crematorium.

The remaining two were men: Schmidt, Miss Charles' solicitor, a squat Germanic figure of about my own age; and an old man, white-haired, with a stooped thin figure and a tremor in his hands, whom Schmidt presented as Colonel Stypulovitch. He spoke English with a melancholy Slav drawl, and I wondered what he was doing here. Something to his advantage, also? But why us? Perhaps there had been others summoned, I thought, but only we two had attended. We were an odd couple but I had the feeling that we had financial need in common, at least. His suit was patched at the elbows, and his shirt-collar frayed. His black tie had the patina of years.

Nothing much was said, then or on the later journey to the house. Schmidt took us in his car, a black Mercedes. Marie let us in; and seeing her, unchanged, it seemed, even to the look of jealous disapproval, I had the first stab of true realisation that Tilly was dead, that it was the body I had loved which had crumbled, an hour earlier, to ash and white charred bone.

The same miniatures hung in the hall, and in the drawing room there was the long foot-stool, worked with a hunting scene in *petit point*, on which, ridiculously, I had once knelt to plead. Only one thing, as far as I could see, was different. The top of the piano, on which she had played me Chopin, had always been kept clear. Something stood on it now. A tape recorder.

Schmidt said, "My instructions were to leave you here. There is a message on the tape. I have not heard it, though, of course, I am aware of Madame's arrangements. Do you know how this machine works? That is good. I will be in the garden, when you want me."

He left the room. The colonel stood staring at the instrument, showing no sign of approaching it. I had been prepared to leave things to him, recognising his seniority. But he still did not move, and I went to the tape recorder myself, and switched it on. It hummed into life, and I pressed the play-back button. Tilly's voice was in the room with us.

"I wonder if you are both here," she said. The shock of recognition again; she sounded a little tired, but there was the same warm huskiness. "I have kept track of you, though in your case, John, with difficulty because you move about so much, and I can rely on Schmidt to have sent you the cables, but further than that I have no control. I hope you have both come. I think you will have done.

"My life, as you know, was made up of commerce with men. I have no idea how many men there were. I kept no records and, insofar as I could, no memories. I used them, as they used me. In my whole life, only two of my lovers ever mattered to me, and those are the two that I have called to my funeral. They were also, as it happened, my first lover and my last."

I looked at the colonel. He was standing with his hands on the back of a chair—the delicately curved early Victorian armchair, covered with red velvet, on which she had sat and smiled while I read Swinburne to her—and his eyes were fixed on the window, through which, in the far distance, one could see the snowy serrated peak of the Dent du Midi.

"You, Pietr," she said. "Paris, in 1919, when I was seventeen and you a mature émigré of twenty-nine. I fell in love with you, and you let me, and perhaps you were in love as well: I was never sure. But you had to leave me, did you not, because I had nothing and, with your estates four years in the hands of the Soviets and the hope of their return as good as vanished, you needed to marry for money. And you did, but she kept her hands on it, and ten years later, when she divorced you, you had nothing. While I, by that time, was beginning to be rich.

"And you, John, thirty-five years later, an importunate schoolboy, the very last of all those to whom my body gave joy —turned away by me, as I was turned away, at the same age, by the one I desperately loved. What has happened to you? You came down from Oxford without a degree, went into the family business but could not stick it, drifted from that to a series of activities each of which was just a little more shady than the one before. Now, like Pietr, you have nothing. Except, of course, youth. You would agree that is important, but you do not know how important. Pietr does."

Her voice paused, and the tape whirred on, and the colonel did not shift his gaze. His hand trembled, but the rest of his body was stiff and still.

"I have no friends, and no relations that I wish to remember or be remembered by. I am dying here, surely and quite quickly and, thank God, with not much pain. I live, for the little time there is to live, in the past, with my memories. Not the memories of great men, great occasions. Those shadows will not come to life, nor would I want them to. I **live** in the memory of the two who mattered: my first lover and my last. And I think of you both with love, and gratitude."

In the china-cabinet there was an ostrich egg, bound and tricked out with silver and gold by a craftsman of the great days

of Fabergé. I had seen one very like it, when I was killing an hour one morning in the Victoria and Albert Museum, and had been filled with nostalgia. The house was full of treasures. With love, and gratitude? No friends, she had said—no relations that she wished to remember. Her voice went on, as though she had known my thoughts:

"I am a wealthy woman, and it is the duty of the wealthy to order their affairs before they die. In my case, it is very simple. There is Marie, of course, who has been with me for twenty years. She is to have an annuity which will keep her in comfort for the rest of her days. She has no taste for any but the most modest luxury, and nephews and nieces who would make her life a burden if they felt there was anything to be got out of her. Apart from that, there are only two people to whom I wish to leave anything."

My mind had been running that way, but even so the thought was dazing. I glanced at the colonel; had his eye flickered? He wore gold-rimmed spectacles, and one of the side-pieces had been mended, carefully but obviously, with tape. We had things in common, but as Tilly had said, youth was not one of them. I was glad she had remembered him, too, and that she had forgiven him.

"There are two legacies," her voice went on, "but they are not equal. One far outweighs the other. To one of my lovers I bequeath my house and money and investments, all my goods and chattels with a single exception. To the other, I leave that exception: my jade beads."

The blow was the more numbing for the hopes I had been building. I knew the beads; how could I not? She had worn them, and my fingers had caressed them, and I had said to her, "I love your beads," and she had smiled, and said nothing. This was my inheritance from her—this, and nothing else.

"Goodbye," the voice said. "Goodbye to my two dear lovers."

The tape moved on but there was only the quiet hiss of its progress.

I switched it off, and turned to the colonel.

I said, "I suppose we might as well go into the garden, and find Schmidt."

I was trying to keep the hostility and resentment out of my voice, but I did not know if I was succeeding. It was understandable that, having forgiven him, she should have left him the lion's share—her first lover, and now an old man. Neither of us had anything in the way of money or prospects, but I had youth,

resilience. But she could have left me something. The beads . . . worth twenty or thirty pounds, probably. Far less than the hundred which this trip was costing me, a hundred I could not afford.

She had kept track of us both, she said; through inquiry agents, most likely. It would not have needed a very bright inquiry agent to work out my circumstances.

I did not want to think ill of her, but it was not easy to be magnanimous.

The colonel nodded silently, and we went out through the french windows. There was a date palm, looking no different from that very first afternoon, bearing, as it had done then, a thrusting yellow sheath of budding flowers. A remote descendant of the thrush that had sung that day sang the same song now. Schmidt came towards us from the laurels. He nodded to the Colonel, and put his hand out, smiling, to me.

"My congratulations, Mr. Harris. It is an impressive estate. Nearer a quarter of a million than two hundred thousand. I have all the details in my office."

I got rid of Schmidt, with some difficulty and the promise of coming to see him the following morning at his office. The colonel, it appeared, had put up at a little lodging-house a street or two away. We stood on the pavement in bright May sunshine, and he nodded to me; a gesture of farewell.

I said, "Come and have a drink."

He shook his head. "I am sorry, Mr. Harris, but I do not drink."

"Then come for a walk along the lake." He looked at me with no response. "You can spare half an hour. There's something I want to say to you."

He looked at me a second or two longer, and nodded slowly. We walked down the hill together, and I noticed that he dragged his left foot slightly. At the main road, we had to wait some time for a gap in the stream of glossy cars pouring west and east. An E-type Jaguar snarled past, and I watched it disappear round the corner towards Villeneuve. We made our way through the Casino gardens, and turned right. Pedalos floated on the glassy surface of the lake, and there was late snow on the peaks of the High Savoys. A woman passed us, comforting a crying child.

I was finding it more difficult to speak than I had thought, but at last I managed to say, "I'm sorry."

"Sorry?"

He repeated the word as though it were from a language he did not understand.

"She should have left you something," I said.

He replied, with irony, "She did."

"Listen," I said, "she was old, and tired . . ." Wandering, I thought of adding, but did not. There were those forgotten relations to think of, though I was confident that a Swiss will drawn up by Schmidt would take a bit of shaking. "She would have wanted you to have something, I know that. Let me do it for her. A thousand, say."

"Mr. Harris," he said, "I have accepted charity in my life, but I will accept none from you." His voice was cold and thin, full of stiff-necked pride. Nothing would shake him.

"All right. No charity. Sell me the beads, if you like. I'll give you a thousand for the beads."

We were by the piscine. There was splashing of water, the sound of excited young voices. A lovely girl, about twenty, wearing a blue bikini, looked down at us from the wall. The colonel stopped and looked away, across the lake. "They are worth more than that."

I almost laughed, but did not.

"Two thousand, then." Nearer a quarter of a million, Schmidt had said. "No, five thousand. Five thousand pounds, Colonel, for the string of jade beads."

He did not look at me, and it seemed a long time before he spoke. He said softly, "I will not sell the beads."

"Don't be silly," I said. "You need the money."

He did not reply, and I grasped his arm, feeling not much more than skin and bone through the worn cloth. Anger was rising in me, though I did not know why, nor even against whom it was directed.

"Ten thousand!" I said. "Twenty!" I was aware of my own folly, and amazed by it, but had to go on. "A hundred thousand . . ."

His gaze stayed on the lake, and the mountains whose white purity was mirrored in it.

"Half," I said. I was angry and pleading at the same time. "Half of what she left me, for the beads."

Then he turned to look at me, his eyes blinking and watering behind the old-fashioned spectacles with the mended side. He said, "I gave them to her. It was the only gift I ever made her. She kept it, and now she has given it back to me."

He shook his arm free from my hand. "You fool," he said. "You *poor*, young fool."

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Blondes, Brunettes or Redheads?

A PUZZLE FOR THOSE WHO ARE MATHEMATICALLY MINDED

by **NICHOLAS SCRIPTURE**

In the beginning, Bill's stag party was going to be simply an occasion for a few close friends to meet at the local for a drink. However, things escalated. He had kept very quiet at the office about his approaching wedding, but the news had slipped out, and several men from the office turned up. Again, his best man generally met a few of his own friends on a Friday evening. They arrived as well.

In short, the party assumed such proportions that when Bill was asked next day how many had been there, the only numbers he could recall were the results of a poll concerning the company's taste in girl friends.

For example: Six of those present had liked redheads, and these six were also among the twenty-two who had liked blondes. However, not all those who liked blondes had any time for redheads or brunettes. In fact, seven of them stated categorically that they had no time for anyone who was not a blonde. On the other hand, there were three stalwarts who gave voice to the opinion that brunettes were the only girls worth bothering about, though at some time or another sixteen of the men present had had brunette girl friends.

Although Tom could remember only this, a little thought revealed that he had enough information to determine how many men there had been at the party; and he was also able to calculate how many of them liked all girls, regardless of whether blonde, brunette, or redhead!

What were these numbers?

Solution on page 153

THE TALE OF A MAN WHO FOUND SUCCESS BUT LOST THE KEY TO HAPPINESS □ BY JACK COPE

Life and Little Fishes

MR. Katz stopped his car on the edge of the quay and he got out and peered down into the dark water. He stood there a long time, his face an ashy smear in the gathering dusk. Then he wiped his forehead, trembling a little, and pulled the hat down again. He stuck his hands in the pockets of his heavy velvet-collared overcoat and as he stepped back his foot caught in the crane track so that he stumbled, grabbing at a bollard to support himself, while his heart bumped about and his knees went weak. He took the brandy bottle out of his pocket and had the smallest gulp. Feeling calmer, he started off, walking slowly along the dockside.

The wharves were strangely deserted, the berths empty and only a few ships at moorings away across the harbour. Three healthy young wharfmen in peaked caps and blue overalls loomed up past him and he sank his face lower on his chest; a nondescript paleness was all they would see under the dark hat.

He turned along one of the piers and the air there seemed to become still and dense, full of the smells of fish and pinewood and of the cold salt scent of the water rising up with the growing darkness. There were rusty old anchor chains and piles of smashed crates and fish-baskets on the quay. He sat to rest on an ancient half-sunken ship's cannon; he would go back to the car later and . . . well, later, when nobody was about. He did not want any curious people about, and it was not yet dark enough.

"Have you come to fish, mister?" a croaky boy's voice asked him and he started so sharply Mr. Katz nearly lost his balance.

"Fish? No, not me," he said. He had not seen the boy, who

was sheltered in an angle made by a pile of fish crates. The boy had his legs spread wide and was busy with a knife, splitting a crayfish.

"I got some more line and hooks and you can lend one if you like."

"No—no—not me," Mr. Katz said.

"No? But why you come here, mister? Gentlemen, they sometimes comes to fish an' all that."

"Why are you here? Your mama will give you a good hiding for not being home."

The boy went off into a husky warm laugh. "Gee, mister, you funny."

"Oh yes, I am one great joke," Mr. Katz said.

"I don' mean that, sorry, mister. You see, I don' go home, I stay here catch fish."

"All night?"

"All night. I mean, if I catch ten-twelve bunches I make enough money tomorrow."

"What's that—you catch fish to sell, for a living?"

"Gee!" the boy chuckled. "Course—what else?"

Mr. Katz goggled at him. He was about twelve, small for his age, and he had a big gay mouth, dark skin and untidy hair, curly and black.

"I go up, sell my fish on the way home. I got to pay Auntie, she's not my real auntie, I mean, but me and Sus we live there. I got to pay for Sus too."

"And then?" Mr. Katz put in. He was really shocked.

"And then I sell the *Argus* afternoons in Buitengracht Street near the old German church."

"*Gewählt!* When do you sleep?"

"I just sleeps anyways," the boy laughed.

"And you are not at school?"

"No, mister, Sus goes to school."

Mr. Katz shook his head.

The boy had his hook baited with a piece of crayfish and he threw out the line, hitting the water with a faint plop. "If you hold the line while I done another hook," he said hopefully.

"No—no—not me. I'm not fishing, see."

He watched while the boy gave the line a turn round his big toe. "I mean, the hottentots is slim," he said gaily. "Strike quick when you feels the nibbles or they somar sucks off your bait."

He went on with his work, trying to keep the feel of the line on his toe while he prepared the second hook.

"Here, give over that line to me," Mr. Katz said at last. He got

down and sat near the boy, and soon he was holding two lines while the young fisherman busied himself with a third.

As the last evening glow drained away the mountain darkened until its vast looming shape seemed to heave above the daze of city lights and its outline sheared into the lilac sky. Then, a while later, the moon came up in their faces, reddish-yellow and huge among a tangle of boat masts and rigging across the fishing harbour. From time to time Mr. Katz felt a faint tug and he jerked excitedly. But when he pulled up the line he found a bare hook.

"Night's the best time, I mean, but they not biting yet. Those is tiddlers," the boy said. "The bigger ones is shy, or else seals chase them away. They'll come back later, don' worry. We might get a stockfish or a cob. Don' worry, mister."

"I'm not worrying." Mr. Katz shivered.

The air was so dark and drenched with the breath of the cold seawater. Ripples lapped on the piles and black things seemed to emerge only to slide back. He gazed down in a surge of horror. Then he looked at the moon again and felt calmer. The boy had on nothing but a khaki shirt and shorts and a man's waistcoat.

"Did you eat anything for supper, sonny?"

"No, mister, I make a fire just now. I cook a fish."

"But you caught no fish yet."

Stiffly Mr. Katz rose to his feet, dragging himself on the cannon, and he walked off at his slow shuffle. He was away a long time and when he returned he had a piece of bread and sausage and cucumbers he had fetched from the harbour café. They made a fire with broken wood and Mr. Katz sat back against a crate watching the boy with a grey, throbbing envy. Now he could see in the firelight the wide green eyes and the face that every minute sparkled with a mischievous life. Mr. Katz held a line in one hand but he had forgotten all about it. The boy finished eating and said again, "Oh gee, thanks, mister!"

They heard steps along the quay and the boy whispered something hurriedly to him. A moment later he was looking up into the face of a policeman.

"Catch anything?"

"No, what do you know, the stupid fish—they don't want to bite," Mr. Katz said, feeling foolish and his heart thumping.

"I don't know—they were running well last night," the policeman said. "Excuse me, sir, have you a permit to fish here?"

Mr. Katz thought for a few seconds. "Yes, Constable. Now why are you asking me? Of course I have a permit."

"Could I just have a look at it?"

Slowly Mr. Katz pulled from his pocket the half-full bottle and reached out with it. The policeman took it, his eye fixed somewhere near the moon in the low sky. His fingers unscrewed the stopper and, throwing back his head, he took a long gurgling pull. He handed back the bottle.

"Your permit is in order, sir," he said. "But don't make such a big fire. They can see it all the way from Caledon Square."

The boy stood over the fire and damped it in the best way he knew while Mr. Katz looked on. "Gee, mister! Gee you clever."

"I am not so stupid," Mr. Katz said.

They went back to the lines and the boy pulled them up one by one to renew the bait. Then he cracked open another crayfish. The bait was not so fresh and Mr. Katz felt nauseated, but he said nothing. After a while he took out of his inside pocket a closed envelope.

"*Nu*, look here, sonny, I'm going to give this to you and I want you to do something for me, eh?"

"Well, all right."

"I want you to hand it to the police tomorrow."

"Polis?"

"What is it—you're not scared of them?"

"Why not give it to the polisman now?"

"I said tomorrow, and tomorrow I . . . well if you don't want to do a little thing like that."

"No, I give it to them, mister, I promise." He took the letter and tucked it in his waistcoat pocket, saying again, "I promise. Why mister—you going away, eh?"

Mr. Katz said nothing. Suddenly he was thrown in a muddle. The boy was yelling at him: "*Gaats!* man, look at your line—*die donner!*" The cord jerked and whipped, running hot through his nerveless fingers. He grabbed in time to save the reel going over the edge. There was a vigorous succession of heavy tugs on the line. Now he had the presence of mind to hold on tightly.

The boy was dancing on the quay edge in a craze of excitement. "Man, that's a fish. Hold him, mister. *Oo!* Start pulling him in, not so faaast—*Cheee!*"

Mr. Katz was on his knees near the crane track and he felt dizzy and amazed. Half the time he did not know what the boy was shouting, but he could feel the fish struggling and it was something he had never experienced before. Then there was no weight on the line, no tugs. "Oi, oi, oi!" he wailed. "What do you know—he got away."

But the fish swung and he could feel it once more, this time

much weaker. He felt a little disappointed that the fight was over and hauled in the cord hand over hand.

"There he is, mister, a real fish, careful, ai, caarefuul!"

Mr. Katz pulled the struggling and whipping fish over the edge and it fell against the front of his overcoat, leaving a big glistening slimy patch. It was a hottentot of four or five pounds and it lay quivering in the moonlight while the boy stamped his feet and crowed out his delight. Mr. Katz took out his handkerchief and wiped the slimy patch on his coat. Then he thought, Ach, why do I do that? And he put away the handkerchief.

The boy caught the next fish, but only a small one. Then Mr. Katz pulled up two more in quick succession.

"My, but you good. The hotnots is *skelm*, but you more *skelm*, mister," he said.

"Oh yes, I'm very *skelm*."

"They biting good and strong now. We get enough by morning, mister, we go halvies."

"Half? But that is not good business," Mr. Katz said.

"All right, you take all you catch, I take my ones. Fair enough?"

Mr. Katz smiled at him, thinking of his own two sons when they were boys. Now they were grown up and he was alone and sick and empty.

"*Nu* look, sonny, you employ me on commission, you give me twenty per cent, two fish out of the ten. With your profits you go into the market, buy fish off the boats, sell it at twelve-and-a-half mark-up—that's undercutting the trade but you build up turnover that way, understand? You don't sell the *Argus* yourself by the church, that's chicken-feed. You get a claim on the beat and you muscle in on more beats. Then you let in other boys on your territory and take twenty-five per cent cut on profits, see?"

"Gee, mister!"

"You make money."

"Oo *ja*."

"And when you are my age—you throw yourself in the harbour."

The boy shrilled and cackled with husky laughter.

"My, mister, but you clever!"

"Yes, maybe I'm not so stupid."

They did not catch again for a long while. And then Mr. Katz saw the boy had slid back where he sat and was flat on his back, asleep. The moon shone on the boy's parted lips and long eyelashes lying on brown cheeks. The line had slipped out of his

fingers. Bad business, Mr. Katz said to himself, taking off his overcoat and covering the young fisherman. He put more planks on the fire to keep himself warm and then went back to his task.

Splitting up the pieces of crayfish tail for bait nearly made him sick and he pricked his trembling fingers on the hook, but he had got roughly into the way of it. The tide was flowing and he could listen to the slow lap and surge of the water and smell the sea-scents in cold waves. He did not like to look down into the water any more, but for long eternities of time he gazed at the moon now well up in the sky above the city, and the evening star following it. Some birds flew over, calling to one another. Across the water from the South Arm he heard women laughing.

The tug on his line brought him back to himself and he pulled up another small hottentot. Its spiny back pierced his palm as he unhooked it but he was glad to see the bait still intact. He cast again and almost at once had a strong strike. It was quite a big fish, though not as big as that first one.

He put the two catches side by side and he had a peculiar sensation in the top of his stomach—pride or something. Sure he was proud, in a way, of catching a big fish; it belonged to nobody and you just pulled it up out of the water for free, then it belonged to you. Of course you had to be clever to do that—*skelm*.

He glanced at the boy who had now rolled on his side, head on arm, facing the fire. The light was warm on his placid face. Mr. Katz thought about waking him; he would not want to miss things now the fish were running. Besides he could bait hooks, which was a nasty business anyway. But Mr. Katz let him sleep and threw out the line again, listening for the soft plop as it hit the black water away down there. He listened, but did not look.

This time it was quite a while before he had another bite and he got to looking up in the sky and thinking about nothing. The next fish he caught was a small cob, brisk in its struggle and shining a bright silver when he had it laid out in the moonlight. He was feeling the cold without his overcoat and again put planks on the fire.

The boy muttered and licked his dry lips in his sleep. Now and again Mr. Katz took a gulp from the bottle and the heat inside balanced up with the heat outside from the fire. He felt quite comfortable and the stiffness went out of his joints. He noticed the moon had gone over the top and was moving down behind him and it was strange to him that the same star kept following it, very cold and small up there now.

He hadn't been counting the fish he pulled up at intervals, and

nothing more happened. He did not know if he went to sleep or where he was and it did not matter; he no longer minded the stink of the stale crayfish bait.

The big thing that happened was a pull on his line that nearly jerked his little finger off. He felt the sharp pain and for a moment he was stupid and full of confusion. The line was streaking out in his hands but he saved it in time. He pulled and pulled, not daring to go too near the edge. Ach—what was this? he thought. His heart was doing strange things—was he going to have a heart attack? He was scared and he was quite crazy, excited.

For a moment he wanted to shout to the boy to wake up and help him, but he had brought up that first big hottentot alone and whatever this was he wanted to get it himself.

When Mr. Katz at last managed to draw it to the surface he heard the mad thrashing on the water down below there and he wanted to peep over; he had to look. The edge of the stone quay had a horror for him, the water so black and sliding. Still, he had to see, he must work out how he was going to get the fish up. It was churning and jerking on the line.

On hands and knees, gripping the cord and looping it around his palm, he crept gradually forward. The fish would be quite still a moment, only to lash about more furiously. He got at last to the edge and took one timid look over. Then he sank down weakly on his stomach. God, let me only catch this one, he whispered to himself.

As soon as he felt his nerves a bit steadier he began with all the care he could summon into his shivering and aching hands to pull up the line. He reckoned it must be halfway up the side of the granite quay wall—a good deal more pulling, but he was making it. Then he heard a long amazed hiss of breath. The boy was leaning over the edge.

"*Ccheee!* Oo gee, mister, Oo my! *Daar 's* water!"

The fright it gave Mr. Katz nearly made him let go altogether and the fish slipped back with a jolt on the line.

"Ooo *hemel. Aarde*, mister, don' lose him, man." The boy was quivering all over.

Mr. Katz wanted to say something but his throat was too dry. He started pulling again at the cord which chafed over the edge of the sea-wall.

"Slow, mister, careful. More, more, a leetle more . . . I soon get my hand in his gills."

Mr. Katz pulled again. Then there was simply no weight on the line, and an instant later a big splash. "Oi, oi . . ." he gasped

faintly. He laid his forehead down on the cold stone. He wanted to weep and he lay there on his stomach listening to the moans and cries of the boy.

"O *die donner*! Shame. Ooo—that was a fish."

The boy examined the line carefully. "Gee, mister, look. The hook broke. So it wasn't your fault, honest. Take a look."

Mr. Katz sat up and tried to get his eyes focused in the moon-darkness on the thin shank of the hook. "Well, so the hook broke. Sure, everybody will love to believe that when I tell them."

"But it's true, man. It's not your fault, mister, it's my fault."

"Don't talk silly now, it was nobody's fault."

They built up the fire again and the boy began to count over the fish catch. "Haai! there's eleven bunches; that big one's a bunch all by himself. I only catch three-four, enough for one bunch. A kabeljou too! Why you let me sleep, man? All these fish is yours." He was twisting the strips of split cane to tie the bunches through gill and mouth.

Mr. Katz did not see himself as a hawker tooting a horn through the city streets with his bunches of fish. "They are yours, sonny, you can take them all and sell them," he said.

The boy turned down his big eyes and went on with the tying.

"I mean it, don't be stupid now," Mr. Katz said wearily. "It was your lines and hooks and bait. Go on, I'm not a fisherman, I'm a business man."

A tear gathered in the boy's eye and he brushed it angrily away. "No, mister, you catch them."

"Ach, what's that—I like this fishing, see."

"Gee—thanks. Mister is a king."

Mr. Katz snorted and coughed peevishly into his handkerchief. "But if I had got that last one, now . . ."

"Haai!" the boy sighed, thinking that Mr. Katz might have given it to him too.

The moon was setting and the masts of the fishing vessels beginning to show against the cool paling sky above the city when Mr. Katz and the boy put out the fire and swept the ashes carefully over the edge. The boy dumped the fish bunches in the boot of the car and he climbed in the seat and watched Mr. Katz give a kind of shudder as he started the motor. The boy still had in his pocket the note to the police. Neither of them thought of it.

As they came to a halt at the Customs barrier Mr. Katz remembered something. Poking his haggard face out at the car window he asked the duty officer, "*Nu*, where is the place to be getting a permit—you know what I mean—to fish?"

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The Difference

BY E. VESSIE McLEOD

IT was April of 1943. Four days earlier my ship had reached Halifax, and as my home on the West Coast was too far away, I came to Kitchener to spend my leave with my cousin. We've relatives scattered all over the East.

Today I'd come downtown to shop around for a birthday present for Mom. King Street was busy with people in from the farms around, all mixed up with city people from Waterloo and Kitchener. And there were many uniforms: Air Force blue, and everywhere khaki, with lots of CWACs from the training camp; but not many in the blue of the Navy.

I felt good. I was twenty-three, and healthy, and the war would never touch me. I was going past the Walper House when I saw Nick Kolinsky. "Nick Kolinsky—Winsky—Slinsky" we used to chant at him when I was going to school, and we all used to go down to watch the boats come in, and wait for the mail. Nick and some of his school mates walked the six miles from the Ukrainian settlement way back in the bush, at the foot of Old Baldy Mountain, to watch the boat and get the mail, too.

And here he was, big, his brown face darker than ever, tanned from outdoors, stiff black hair showing at the sides where his Army cap sat at the correct angle. He'd filled out; he held his shoulders back. In the old days he used to slink along, as if ashamed. My gosh, I thought, he actually looks good in that battle dress. Then he turned and our eyes met.

All in a second I saw his loneliness turn into a glad recognition. His face became that of the boy who used to walk from the settlement. He hesitated. I grabbed his hand, afloat with homesickness. Seeing him was like seeing the mountains again, with their tips of snow reaching for the sky, their lofty rounded slopes

wrapped in the ragged green plush of forest. I was home again, smelling the salt of a stormy sea as I waited for the mail.

I slapped his shoulder. "Nick! Nick Kolinsky! My God, it's good to see you!" I meant it, and he knew it.

He squeezed my hand in return. "It's good to see you, Bob."

"I knew you were in the Army," I said. "Where're you stationed?"

"At Borden. I'm going over," he said. "At last, I'm going over. I should be there before Christmas. I was starting to think I was going to sit it out, here."

"Are you kidding? Nobody sits it out, if the brass can help it."

He laughed. "I heard in Saskatchewan that you'd joined the Navy. The Fall of '40, wasn't it?"

"That's right." I remembered that Nick had gone to Saskatchewan in '37. The Depression had been bad then, up the Coast; all he'd got to do was punching shingle bolts. Less than three dollars a day, and the work so heavy that before that only Orientals would tackle it. Dad had come home one night and mentioned that Nick Kolinsky had ruptured himself at the bolts and was in hospital.

"That's too bad," Mother said, but she didn't really mean it. "Keep away from those people at the Settlement," she'd always told me when I was a kid. "Don't lower yourself." I never thought too much about it. They were different, the Settlement people. Not just that they either spoke English poorly, or not at all. It's hard to pin down; they were simply different.

When I heard Nick was in hospital I was thankful Dad had been able to get me into the paper mill in the nearby town. Without luck, it could be me in hospital, my guts pulled apart using a pickaroon on those damn bolts. When he got out of hospital, Nick went to the Prairies.

"Look," I said, "come home with me, to my cousin's."

He hesitated again, looking round at the people hurrying along, oblivious of strangers, whether civilian or uniformed. Then he said, "Okay, if you think it'll be all right." He had a far less noticeable accent than he used to have. In the Settlement the families spoke Ukrainian, and this made it hard for the kids.

We had a good supper, and I could see my relatives liked Nick. He had a sort of dignity about him, and when he laughed his whole face lit up and you forgot his nose was too big. He had his sergeant's stripes up, and you could see why: he'd know how to handle men; he'd be respected by them. When I thought of this, Nick was explaining about his transfer to the Heavy

Machine Gun Corps, and inwardly the knowledge made me pause, recalling the days when respect and Nick Kolinsky were worlds apart.

My cousin placed the dessert in front of us, saying, "But why so eager to get over there? You're doing your part here just as much. I don't understand you boys."

"Well—" Nick looked embarrassed, but he tried to make her understand. "You see, my people are Ukrainians. Lots of times I heard them talk of what it was like in Europe—people starving, afraid to open their mouths for fear the police would find out . . ." His words dried up and he gulped his tea. Then he looked at us, as if daring someone to laugh. "We—I know what we have here—I'm a Canadian, and I—well, it's a man's duty to try and keep it the same . . ."

I stared at my plate. "Nick Kolinsky—Winsky—Slinsky—Boobinsky . . ." If only I could have rolled back time, or at least killed memories . . .

Nick and I went to a dance for service people that night.

I enjoyed myself at the dance. The girls were pleasant, and they were friendly with us; not like in some towns. Nick danced a lot, too, and when we glanced at each other one of us would wink. On the way home we went by the small park, with its winding, man-made stream, where the willows dipped into the water, and you could canoe when it got too hot. We leaned on the railing and looked into the park.

"It sure doesn't smell like salt water, does it?" Nick said.

I laughed, partly to cover the fact that he'd spoken my thoughts. "Nothing smells like home. The Atlantic is salt water, but it doesn't smell like up the coast, either."

"When this's over, I'm going up that Coast and I'll never leave it again." Nick lit a cigarette, and the glow illuminated his face briefly. "I'll get a job in a logging camp—there'll be jobs; it won't be like before—and evenings and weekends I'll go fishing."

"It's the mill again for me." I tossed a pebble across the grass. It rolled, splashed into the void.

Nick stirred. "There's nothing like catching a salmon. When I was home I used to get up at four o'clock and go down and fish for a couple of hours, till Dad needed me at the ranch. We worked so late I couldn't fish in the evenings. You know, just off the breakwater, just past Shelter Point, how the water is shiny and all silver, and you're rowing along, and all of a sudden a salmon strikes, and you see it leap from the water, way behind you . . ."

I drew in my breath. "I didn't know you liked to fish in the

chuck. Everybody that I knew of my age always wanted to go to the river, or the lakes . . ." I stopped.

"So did everybody I knew. I thought I was the only one."

"So did I."

The silence grew long, and the heavy damp of the warm inland air pressed in on us.

"I got a twelve-pounder one evening off Shelter Point." In my mind, I could still see that fish.

Nick laughed, and something about his easy manner made me know that when we got back things would be the same as they were with us now.

"You beat me," he said. "The best I ever did was nine pounds —and seven ounces. Bob, I guess we've a date for fishing off Shelter Point."

We shook on it, there in the darkness.

We wrote after that, fairly regularly, and then there was a long wait after one of his letters. When the next one came it was from England. I wondered if he'd been on one of the ships we'd convoyed across.

We were almost into Halifax when we heard it was D-Day. The skipper announced it over the loudspeaker when I was reading, waiting to go on watch: ". . . the Allies have landed on the Continent . . . this is D-Day. I repeat—this is D-Day. You've known it was coming from things you saw. This is it. They're piling them ashore . . ."

I didn't hear the rest. ". . . they're piling them ashore . . ." The Navy . . . I wished I was there, instead of in a rolling corvette heading into Slackers. I thought of the different ones I knew who would be there. Lucky dogs. Pete and Mark were on the Landing Craft: they'd be in the thick of it. Bill was with the Royal Navy on a destroyer: he'd be there.

Then I thought of Nick. He'd be among the first ashore. I think I prayed for him; and the others. At least I said a sort of prayer, in which the invasion and fishing off Shelter Point were all mixed up together.

My thoughts ended when a shipmate reminded me that it was my watch. I remembered then that Halifax was less than six hours away, and thought of the leave I had coming up. In ten days I'd be home. Home! It was over a year since I'd been back.

That boat trip up the Coast to home—the green, peaceful water of summer, wavering in long smooth swells out from the *Lady Cecilia*'s bow, the groups of people on the wharves en route . . . My God, it was good to see that this was all still going on, as it had done since I could remember. And with D-Day

past, it wouldn't be long before the young people would be there again, too. We went through Welcome Pass, and I saw the white rocks off to the right, and in the distance Shelter Point; but it was too far away to make out the stumps of the breakwater.

Mom and Dad and I talked half the night, and when I awakened next morning it was late. Dad had gone to work, and out in the kitchen I heard Mom moving about. I lay and listened to the whisper of waves on pebbles, and then got up. It was funny, somehow, to see everything just as it'd always been. Mom bustled about getting my breakfast, and I sat in the rocker and smoked. She picked up the kettle to fill it, and as she did so glanced through the window.

"Oh, there's Mrs. Kolinsky," she said, in an odd tone. "She's going in for her mail. She'll be over as soon as she gets it."

"Mrs. Kolinsky—here?" I was incredulous, but I was glad. I'd worried a bit about what Mom would say about Nick and me. I didn't want words about it, but if they came they wouldn't change anything.

"Oh, yes." Mom stopped and stared at me, a peculiar look, half-ashamed, half-defiant, pleading. "She always comes in and sees me this last year. It's funny—one day in the store we both had airmails and I noticed hers, and knew of course it was from Nick, and she noticed mine, and we smiled . . ." Her voice trailed off. I waited. "Bob, you'll be nice to her, won't you? It'll be hard on her, seeing you. Try and think of something to say to her."

"Of course I'll be nice to her." I spoke sharply, and it was in my mind to say more, but seeing Mom's expression, I hesitated.

"Of course," she said slowly, "you don't know. You couldn't."

"Know what?" But somehow I knew.

"Nick was killed on D-Day—killed in the first wave that tried to get ashore. He . . ." Her voice went on, but I heard no more till I was going out of the door, and she called, "Bob, don't be long, she'd want to see you I know. She'd be hurt . . ."

"I won't be long."

I was on the beach. I leaned back against the cool, rough trunk of a fir. The air was fresh and clean and salt; there was a wet band of pebbles at the edge of the sea; the tide was ebbing, taking with it chunks of brown driftwood, bobbing, swaying, rolling in the gentle swells. Useless, helpless bits of flotsam. I found I was staring across the water at Shelter Point. *"You know, just off the breakwater, just past Shelter Point, how the water is shiny and all silver, and you're rowing along, and all of a sudden a salmon strikes, and you see it leap from the water, way behind you . . ."*

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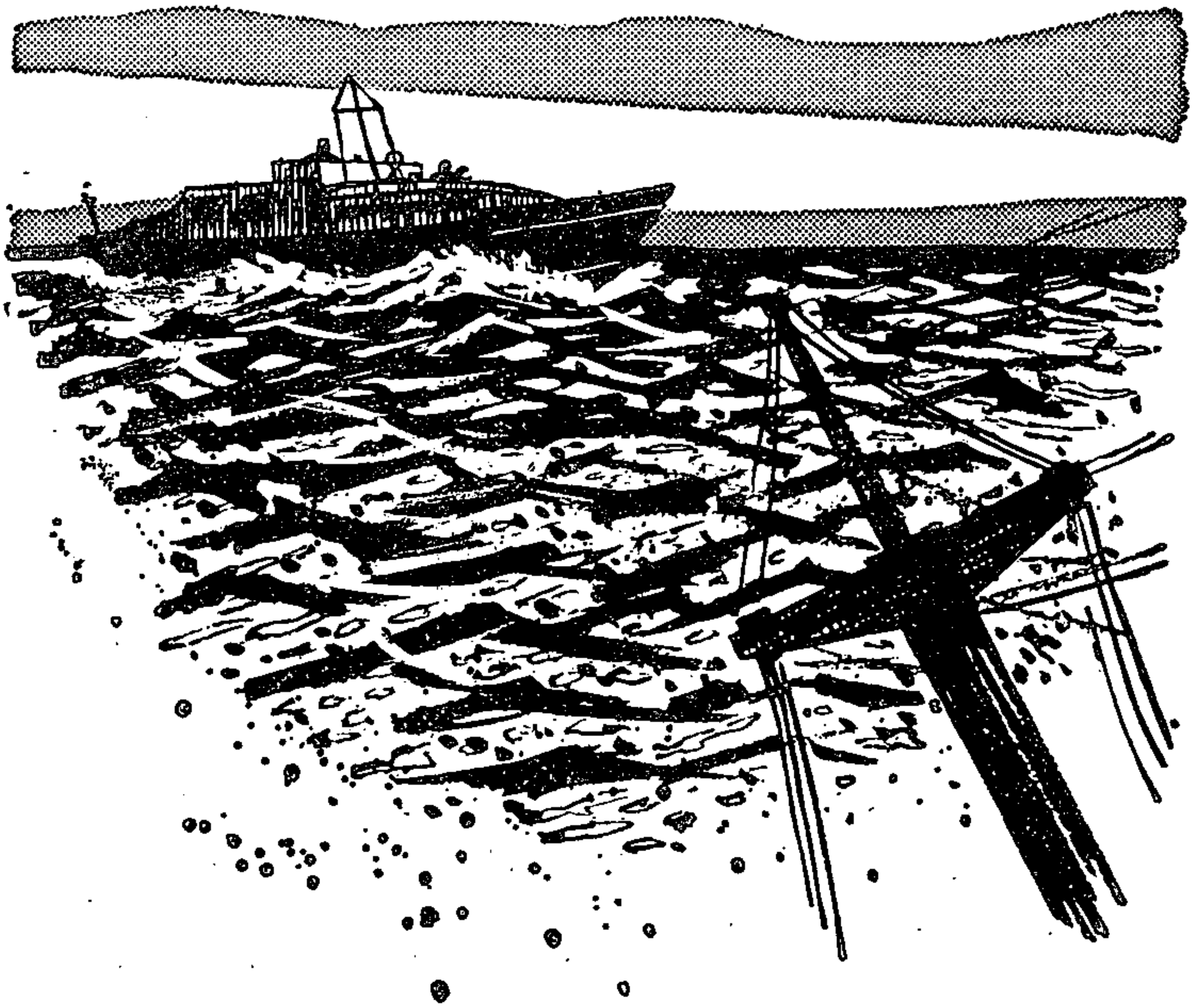
NEW LONG COMPLETE THRILLER BY

ALAN DIPPER

TIDES OF CONFLICT

WE WERE in the *S.S. Maude Grayson*'s No. 3 hold, under seven fathoms of dirty grey estuary water, when the bomb started to tick. Edwards reared up, bubbles exploding from his mask, and made an instinctive swoop for the hatchway. As he passed over me I grabbed a foot flipper, hauled him down, and shook my head. The twins of



the two-ton beauty we were working on were racked row upon row about us. Their combined weight totalled 6,000 tons of high explosive and fragmentation steel. If our pet was going up we would need to be three miles away to save ourselves. There just wasn't time to run. I picked up the two-foot wrench and clamped it on the nose cone. I suppose it had all started over twenty years ago when I ran a bomb disposal section. Lieutenant Simon Algive. Two wavy stripes, a beard, and a strong sense of drama. Awake or sleeping, we lived bombs. Buried bombs, bombs in houses, bombs on ships—bombs under water. After a while one got a feeling for them. Inside the

squat grey heads one sensed a brain. Heavy, cunning, waiting. It was an eerie fantasy but there was no doubt that something very like an extra sense, an affinity with the mechanism we destroyed, did develop.

Eventually I specialised in underwater work until in 1945 I found myself on the beach with three months' pay, a slender gratuity, and fathoms of boredom to swim in. This sea of ennui lasted twenty-one years, during which time I tried a dozen jobs. By ordinary standards these were not dull, but living with death is the subtlest of drugs: the system craves, and nothing but the real stuff will satisfy.

I was running the drill of an oil rig on one of the North Sea gas projects when the boredom ceased. I had come ashore after a two-month shift. I'd caught the 5.30 down to London and made for the Ranelagh in Pimlico. It's a satisfying sort of pub. Smooth and modern, but quiet, with something of the feeling of a ship about it.

I suppose I stood out a bit. The curved bar was full of young business men and their girls, and I was still in sea rig; sweater, monkey jacket, and turned-down sea boots. I'm six feet two inches high and the beard has survived the vicissitudes of civilian life, even if, at forty-two, it is showing a bit grizzled round the edges. A little mini-skirted brunette, seal-sleek hair curved round her face, had been edging up the bar towards me for the last ten minutes. I was idly wondering how she would make contact when I looked up and there was Edwards.

Alisdair Edwards. Background, Rhondda Valley. Shanghaied into the Navy at sixteen by the town orphanage. Petty Officer at twenty-two. Five feet ten tall, hair curly black, round happy face. A chubby Dylan Thomas sort of Welshman—until you noticed the eyes. Nothing poetic there; they were cold as a North Sea conger.

He was the best bomb killer I ever had. The Navy hadn't ruined his hands; they were long and white and cared for; pianist's hands, which could play a bomb fuse like a Bechstein.

He hadn't changed much. The face was rounder, the hair still plentiful but greyish, the too-well-cut suit gently disguised an incipient paunch. Holding his arm was the most vital woman I have ever seen.

He came over to me, clicked the heels of his fancy slip-on shoes and said, "973 Petty Officer Edwards reporting—Sir!" He gripped both my arms and said, "Simon bach, it's wonderful to see you."

I was more than pleased to see him. After the unit split up I'd lost trace of them all. One doesn't make friends in my kind of life; just drinking partners, and women whose faces blur one into the other as the years pass. I put my arm round his shoulders and said, "Al! How very, very good! You're fat as a mating seal."

His eyes were crinkled round the edges with good humour, the conger look seemed to have faded. He said, "This is Elise." Nothing else, just the one name. I never did find out the rest.

I asked them what they would have and she said a vodka and tonic; he ordered sherry. I was drinking rum—it's an anti-social, rather theatrical, habit, but I like the stuff. The Ranelagh's idea of sherry is about half a pint of nectar served in a glass so full you have to get down and lap, but it was an odd drink for Edwards. He curled his long fingers round it and we all squeezed into one of the booths. He set the glass down and hadn't spilled a drop.

The girl was between us, and her right thigh pressed against me. She wasn't flirting, the booths are small, but I've never felt such excitement at being near a woman. The psychic alarm that could tell me when a bomb was going up was clamouring in my head. I have often thought that there's a kind of electro-magnetic field round a human being that reacts when it crosses certain others. This was like standing on the bridge with lumps of St. Elmo's Fire crawling all over you. The instinct that had sent me kicking to the surface with a blow-up thirty seconds behind was shrieking *get out*. Every bit of hungry masculinity in me was caught and held by her.

She wasn't at all a fashionable shape. Her legs were somewhat short but beautifully formed, encased in fishnet stockings—dancer's legs. The skirt pulled up over her thighs as she sat, but she didn't care. The slender waist was circled by a huge black belt. The breasts, like a sailor's dream, rounded out a white silk, high-collared shirt.

Her face was strange. Framed in straight black hair. Square-chinned, almost rectangular. Eyes turned down at the outer edge, like Macmillan but without the friendly bloodhound look. Nose pure Roman, high-bridged, arrogant. A forbidding face until one saw the mouth. Huge and dreamy and full lipped. A mouth to hold a man for ever—or eat him alive . . .

Al Edwards coughed gently. I looked away from the girl but it was I who blushed; she stared serenely in front of her.

We had a wonderful evening. I wasn't short of cash; twenty quid a day and Sunday overtime still leaves a bit even when

you've paid your subscription to the H bomb. Al was carrying a wad like a telephone directory. Somewhere along the route we picked up a funny little blonde, but even with the load I was taking on I couldn't register much interest and Al took her over. I don't look at a chocolate box lid when there's a Picasso in the room.

I AM the leading hangover expert of the Western World. Perhaps they do it differently in China, but for me there is only one way. Keep the eyes closed, run a cold bath, submerge for five minutes, absorb a bottle of Löwenbräu lager closely followed by a pint of scalding black coffee. It never fails. In my Ebury Street flat I have the first aid laid on. An oil rig is dry anyway. That morning I woke with all the symptoms, sat bolt upright, and cracked my skull on something very hard. I lay down again moaning softly and, against all instincts, opened my eyes.

I was aboard ship. I was in a bunk, and not in it alone. Elise's strange face, curiously foreshortened, was an inch away. Her hair spread in a black cloud over the pillow—I was surprised there was so much of it. I made a new effort and got one leg over the side. A firm hand pulled me down. She climbed over and out, and crossed the cabin to a diminutive bathroom. I confirmed first impressions of her figure, and even through that black hangover felt happy.

"Keep your eyes closed," she called. "First aid, not modesty!"

She came back with a bowl of cold water and a sponge and mopped my head and shoulders. "Bottle coming up," she said.

It wasn't Löwenbräu but I settled for it. My mouth tasted like a trawler's galley after a month at sea. She twitched a dressing gown over her shoulders and went out. I lay and thought hard. She was back in five minutes, enveloped in a heavenly smell of coffee.

"You read minds," I said.

"Well, you're not exactly a closed book, Simon my love," she answered, and sipped her coffee. The jet black hair fell forward and hung bell-shaped round her face; it was as though a slice of darkness had beheaded her. Her body had the disturbing luminous whiteness of an El Greco. Nowadays, when every woman wants a tan like a Fiji Islander, she seemed archaic and wonderful. I suppose I was staring rather oddly, for she looked up suddenly.

As her face broke through the dark wave of hair she said,

rather breathlessly, "Simon, don't look at me like that—I'm a real, and very ordinary, woman."

I hated saying it, but it had to be done. I said, "Elise, we were pretty merry last night. If you want to walk out now I won't make a fuss."

She climbed back into the bunk and put her arms round me. She had a grip like a bear. I laughed and said, "Steady on, girl, you'll throttle me!"

She murmured, "Simon, oh, Simon, don't send me away!" Then, "I don't do this with everyone, you know."

It was trite, but from her it didn't sound that way.

I said, "I don't give a damn what you have done before, that's none of my business, but what you do in future is. *If* you want it that way. Understood?"

She held me even tighter. "Yes, Simon, well understood," she said.

An hour later I found Alisdair on deck, literally. He lay on a rug in the autumn sunshine and blinked at me. We were moored in the Chelsea basin. Alisdair's craft was a beauty, the only live thing in that graveyard of boats. She was a 1966, money-no-object, twin-diesel, sea-going, Southampton-built Gentleman's Pleasure Boat.

I squatted down beside Alisdair. "Two things," I said. "I'm sorry about Elise—if you wish I'll leave now, but she goes with me."

He sat up, smiling gently. "Don't worry so, Simon. She's her own woman, nothing to do with me. You're just lucky."

I felt suddenly very happy. "Secondly, then, which bank do you own?"

He said, "Look, Simon, if you don't want to drag Elise off into your Pimlico wilderness, I've something important to discuss."

She had come up the hatch as he spoke and sat down beside me. I said, "All right, old son, let's have it. I won't pretend not to be curious—there's a subtle air of Arabian Nights about this lot."

Alisdair said, "Make us some more coffee, Elise."

She only hesitated for a second—this was not a woman who was used to being told what to do—then she smiled and went below. The smile was wonderful. I couldn't remember if she had turned it on the night before, and this morning we had been in a serious mood, but now it lit her face like sunrise over Bondi Beach, and it was all for me.

I said, "Whatever else you have up your sleeve, Al, thank you for that one."

He got up and stared over the river. "You're welcome," he said absently, then, "Simon, you've had fourteen jobs in the past twenty years and now you're earning good money—right?"

I wasn't even surprised. I don't chat about myself and we'd not exchanged life histories the night before. I said, "Top marks, Petty Officer Edwards. I knew you didn't come to the pub by accident, but how did you trace me in the first place?"

He grinned; there had been a certain tension creeping in, but now we relaxed.

"I have my methods, Watson," he said. Then, "Simon, I had to find you. I need you badly."

I walked over and put a hand on his shoulder. "Look, son, I won't hide any bodies for you, but anything else, just name it."

"Treasure, Simon," he said, "real treasure. Not gold moidores, but worth more money than you ever thought of."

I was disappointed. Everyone has been bitten by the treasure bug at some time; Alisdair should have grown out of it. I was a bit impatient and ready to show it. Then I thought, "Hell! I've struck treasure enough already. Why worry?"

As though on cue, Elise came up with the coffee. I said, "My dove, are you part of this Captain Morgan stuff?"

"This is very very serious, darling," she said. "When Alisdair told me about you I wanted you in." She paused. "Now I don't."

I looked at Edwards curiously. He was no longer a rather fat good-humoured business man. He looked as he had always done before we dived: eyes wide and cold, body menacing, beautiful hands held level with his waist, like a Japanese wrestler ready to strike.

"Don't be a bloody fool, Elise!" he snapped. "If you've fallen for him, I'm glad; you couldn't do better and you'll work well as a team; but if you think I'm giving up a cool million because you're in love you're out of your mind. I need him!"

Her face was as cold as his; I thought of two mambas sparring for a fight. I lifted my coffee cup and said, "Cheers! Dollars or pounds?"

You could feel the tension slacken like snapped elastic. She said cheerfully, "I am sorry, Alisdair, but if we're a team, Simon will be boss and he will please himself. You had better give him the story."

The story was long and strange. I knew I hadn't all of it—I'm not a fool—there were rather too slickly-rounded edges, and areas not accounted for at all, but I had the main drift and was wild with excitement.

In 1940 *S.S. Maude Grayson*, a freighter of 15,000 tons, sailed from the Port of London for Boulogne. She carried 6,000 tons of high explosives, mostly in the form of bombs. Four miles past Isle of Grain and three east of Sheppey, she had her bows blown off by a mine. It must have been a mine; she was inside the sub boom at Leysdown, and a torpedo would have penetrated far enough to reach her cargo and make coloured confetti of her and her crew. She sank in ten fathoms and settled upright. At low tide most of her masts and derricks showed, which was useful in that crowded seaway.

She was still lying there now twenty-six years later. Admiralty inspected her regularly, but the bombs were the kind of workmanship Britain could turn out in those days and were as good now as when they left the factory. It was decided she was too dangerous to touch.

It doesn't need an actuary to work out percentage risk in bomb disposal. If you are very careful and very good, most single jobs could be rated as eighty per cent safe. If there's more than one, I reckon the odds drop steadily, but maybe that's more of a hunch than good arithmetic. The *Grayson* was carrying several thousand bombs. Some time in the defusing of that lot someone would make the one mistake. I think Admiralty were right to leave her.

Somewhere in that ship was a treasure worth over one million pounds sterling. Alisdair didn't make clear where his knowledge originated, but I was starting to put two and two together; so far Elise hadn't fitted in. I filed it all for future reference and let him get on.

It seemed that when the war started certain highly-placed German gentlemen had a look at the international form book and decided to lay off the odds. They formed a syndicate and bought industrial diamonds through Dutch contacts. These went to Sweden and on to England; the consignments were quite small and there's always someone in a ship who will take a chance on smuggling, for good money. In England an agent gradually collected the parcels until a very large consignment indeed was in his hands.

This was fair enough until 1940 when, from Germany, we looked like losing the war within weeks. The syndicate panicked. They knew the routine when the Wehrmacht overran a country, and feared for their nest egg. They could hardly claim it back if it ended up in the hands of the SS.

Urgent orders to transfer to Spain were given, and the agent, for reasons known to himself, chose the *Grayson*. The stones

were to be run through France and over the border. However, their own compatriots did them the disservice of sinking their treasure ship. Their man was drowned, but had left word with the agent as to where he would hide the stuff.

When the tumult and the shouting had died down, none of the original syndicate seemed to be in evidence, but *someone* knew and had a plan of the ship with X marking the spot. Alisdair now had this plan, and our job was simple. Just sail out to a wreck visible from a densely populated shore, ignore twenty-foot Admiralty signs saying "Keep Off", dive down amongst 6,000 tons of high explosives, and pick up the swag.

Compared with what did happen, that programme would have been a cakewalk.

When Alisdair finished I asked a few questions, but I knew I need not have bothered—as far as it went, the story had a smell of truth. I said, "All right, Alisdair, I'm hooked. Let's get down to it."

He thumped me on the back and said, "Not yet. Push off for the day with Elise and get to know each other, or you'll be holding hands over the chart table."

Elise went below and re-appeared in a coat that made me stare. It wasn't mink—that would have been too ordinary; freak arctic fox, very pale gold and probably worth its weight in it. I said, "Why bother looking for diamonds?"

She put her arm round me and we went ashore. Alisdair called, "Be good, children!" after us.

A taxi turned out of Tadema Road, we caught it and went straight to Ebury Street, sitting primly holding hands, suddenly too shy to speak. I opened the door of the flat, picked her up—she was surprisingly heavy—and carried her through the dusty living room and into the bedroom.

About four o'clock we used my jack-knife to open cans of soup, laughing so much we cut ourselves. She had put on an old shirt of mine, and looked about sixteen. I said, "My darling love, how old are you?"

She didn't try to be coy. "I'm thirty-two, Simon. Is that too old?" very seriously.

It was enough to make you cry. I said, "I always wanted to marry an old lady."

She spun round as though I had hit her and cried, "Simon! Simon, there's no need, darling, there's no need!" She didn't make a noise about it, but tears flooded down her face. I never saw her cry again.

I said, "Elise, are you married?" She shook her head. "Well

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that's settled then. Look, I'm going out for one hour. Will you be all right?"

"I'll clean up this pigsty," she said.

I went straight to Long Acre and up six flights of dirty stairs to Marcus' attic office. I can't remember when I first met Marcus, but I know he looked old before the war and looks no different now. I banged on the steel door and shouted.

He called, "Simon! Come in, boy. Do me a favour, borrow some money."

I said, "Marcus, show me some industrial diamonds."

He stared, then shuffled over to a small steel door and unlocked it. The safe is Chubb's best and as big as my living room. It needs to be; Marcus is a top man in stones. In the little German town of Idar Oberstein, which is a gem centre of the world, his wish is law. I called after him, "And whilst you're in there I want an engagement ring—I can go to two fifty."

He dumped a Tate and Lyle sugar carton on the desk and tipped it up. The lump sugar would have looked more attractive. These were just grey pebbles. "A rough test," he said, and drew one of the pebbles over the glass of a photograph of Brighton Pavilion. It sliced a neat line.

"Now this." This time he was careful—almost reverent. He opened a washleather bag and shook out a ring. I picked it up. The setting was gold but minimal. The stone was huge, an emerald, but when you looked down into it you didn't see green, but red fire.

I said, "Very nice, Marcus. Mr. Gulbenkian will love it. Now show me mine."

He closed my hand on it and said, "To you one hundred, the rest is a wedding present. Bring her to see me."

My hour was up but I had one other call to make. I picked up Marcus' telephone and dialled the flat. Most women would have been diffident about answering; she answered at once. I said, "I love you. I want another hour."

She said, "So do I. You need an archaeologist here, not a charlady. Look both ways, my love."

During the afternoon I had asked Elise whom we were working for. It was obvious that Alisdair was not Number One, and equally obvious that she was a go-between. All she would say was, "A man called Garrolain. Alisdair will brief you on it all tonight."

It was a strange name.

I took the Tube up to St. James's Park and walked through to a quiet street of Georgian houses. The front door I pushed open

had "The Tree-Lovers' Club" on a brass plate. I walked down the hall—it was lined with tree prints from Linneas—and into the lavatory at the end. If you reach up behind the old-fashioned cistern and push a button a door opens just beside the W.C. pan —that is, unless it sticks. Very melodramatic. It opens directly into Richard Martin's office. He likes to know at once who is coming through that door.

He was not very pleased to see me. I haven't done a job for him for years.

He grunted, "Hello, Algive. What do you want?" and closed the drawer his hand had been in.

I said, "A man called Garrolain."

He went over to a bank of files, took out a folder and threw it to me; then said, "You're still covered by the Act, but you'd better sign." I knew the paragraphs by heart, and scrawled my name and the folder number on a sheet headed "Official Secrets Act".

In the folder there were four quarto sheets of typing. I read them through twice. There was no photograph. I said, "Can I have a firearms certificate, sir? I live alone in Ebury Street and I'm afraid of burglars."

He said, "Don't be facetious. All right, you wouldn't be mixed up in anything crooked. Call at the Yard for it tomorrow. I shall want a report on that man."

WHEN I opened the door at Ebury Street the flat was as clean as a hospital. I couldn't believe anyone could do so much work in two hours. She was in the bath. I walked in, lifted her up out of the water and kissed her.

She spluttered, "You fool, Simon, you've soaked your coat."

I put her back in, took out the emerald and put it on her finger. It was silly, but on the way home I couldn't remember which finger it should be, but I got it right. She sat up with the water running down her shoulders and over those wonderful breasts, then got out of the bath and hugged me. I can't imagine how I ever thought her face strange. Every feature, every line, was as familiar as my own and utterly beautiful to me.

We dropped in at the Ranelagh for a sentimental drink, and didn't get to the boat until nearly ten—we were both a little light-headed. Alisdair was on deck walking up and down. "Come on, Simon," he said, "We've a hell of a lot to get down to."

We sat at a big table in the cabin, Elise close beside me. I

said, "First, who's in command? I haven't got a power complex, but someone should be."

Alisdair said, "You are. I'd feel odd giving you orders."

I started to make a list, "I shall want Admiralty charts, tide tables, a plan of the *Grayson*—you have that already. A loading schedule would be wonderful, but I expect that's impossible. Two constant-volume diving dresses, the Cousteau pattern. Belts, knives—all the usual gear—plenty of cylinders."

Elise interrupted. "Three," she said.

I said, "Sorry, darling, what do you mean?"

"Three suits," she said.

Well, I knew the sort of woman I had; it was no use arguing. "Three!" I imitated her deep voice and we all laughed.

I said, "I presume the loot will be in waterproofed packages, small ones. We can carry canvas bags on our belts to hold them. We use this craft?" Alisdair nodded. "Good. Now we want an excuse for messing around out there. Any ideas?"

"Fishing?" asked Elise rather doubtfully.

"In this tub? She's so darned smart we wouldn't dirty our decks with fish."

"Photography," said Alisdair. "We're from a glossy magazine and we're taking pictures of clothes against unusual backgrounds. Elise is the model."

Well, *it would do, but*—"What about *at night?*"

"At night we take a chance," said Alisdair.

We kept at it until midnight. Alisdair was to get all stores and gear. He reckoned he would need a week. As we left I said, "What cut is Garrolain giving us?"

He lifted his eyebrows at Elise. "Just the name," she said; *then to me*, "Honestly, *darling*, I *can't tell you any more; it's* not important. You'll never meet and we get fifty per cent of everything recovered, present-day value. You must trust me."

I said, "I rather think I've proved that," and looked at the emerald.

I don't think Alisdair had noticed it, or, if he had, which *finger it was on. Now he looked down at the ring. It was a jolt,* and it worried him, but he only said, "Well, I'll buy the wedding breakfast—I shall be able to afford it."

We had a week and we made the best of it. I took her to Old Hastings where I was born. My grandfather was a fisherman there. We stayed at a little club just outside the town, where they'd known me since I was a boy. I told them we were just married and they gave us a room that hadn't changed since the first Elizabeth. It had a vast four-poster bed and no heating.

They would have liked to give us the whole club, but we had all we needed.

It was a good week. I think I saw the world as it is for the first time. I suppose love is a high state of consciousness and I'd never had my eyes opened before.

There was only one small dark cloud. One day we were down on a little lost beach, skimming flat stones like children. She slipped on the shingle and as I caught her I held her and said, "This job should be over in a week. We'll marry the week after."

She lay very still in my arms and said, "Simon, if anything happens to stop us you must not mind too bitterly—oh, my dear, I do love you so!"

I didn't take that one up with her, but I told myself that as soon as we got ashore from the job I would drag her into the nearest register office. I was taking no chances.

ALISDAIR's floating palace was called the *Sea Marie*. I've no idea why; people give boats the damnedest names. I took her down river and into Sheerness harbour at night without the slightest trouble. She handled like a dream, but I thought she would roll in any sort of sea. It was Sunday evening. Alisdair had given us exactly a week before calling us back to the job.

We had double-checked all gear and were eating supper. Alisdair had got out his plan and was marking small crosses on it: these were where the diamonds were hidden. He got the information from a notebook on the table beside him and he didn't offer to show it to me. There was a bump against the hull and someone shouted. It wasn't an English voice. Alisdair went rather quickly on deck and I could hear a mutter of conversation.

He came back down.

"Okay," he said, "Only HQ making contact. I told them we had everything we needed."

I thought, "Well, the plot thickens!", took Elise's hand and said, "Bed! We sail at dawn," and made up my mind to be counting my money before I parted with the swag.

There was a fog the next morning and that helped. The tide was just at the turn, and the anchor straight up and down; we made very little noise shipping it; I could see no point in advertising our departure. It was chilly on deck but the wheelhouse was centrally heated. All the same I had put on plenty of clothes and made Elise do the same. I had helped dress her and we

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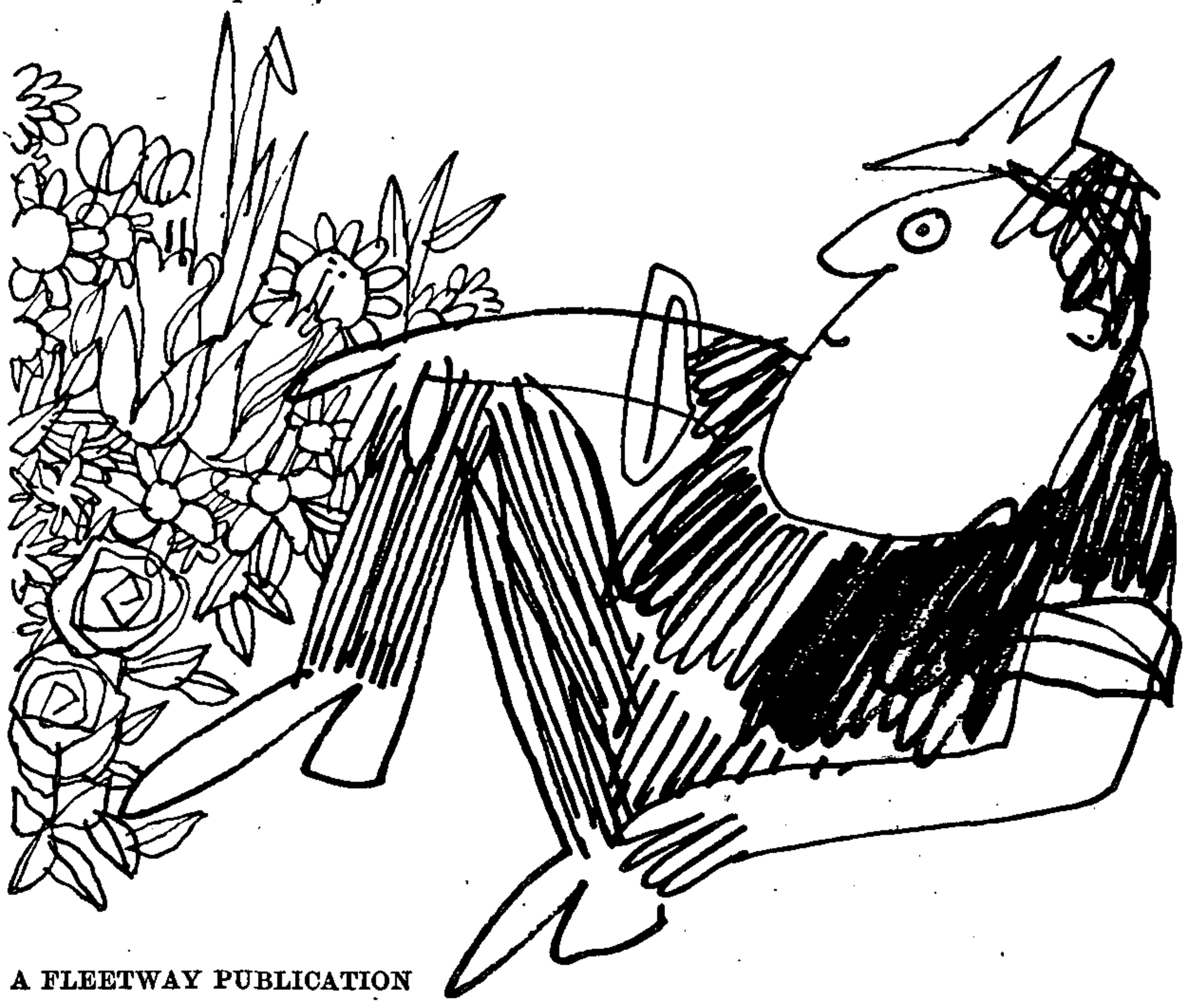

A FLEETWAY PUBLICATION

had laughed ourselves silly when she crawled into the long wool and nylon combinations; they overlapped her arms and legs by a foot. In the end we took scissors to them. It doesn't do to start a dive in European waters with a stiff cold body.

About fifteen feet of masts and derricks showed when we reached the wreck; they were useful. I didn't want to drop an anchor which would almost certainly foul on some part of the wreck—we might want to get away quickly—so I got lines round a derrick. It wouldn't do when the tide really ebbed, but we only wanted an hour on this first attempt.

I struggled into the rubber suit, Alisdair clipped on the cylinders and I tested the supply valves. I was wearing foot fins but had my hands free. I hung a waterproof lamp and a small bag of tools on my belt, took a 200-foot length of very light nylon rope coiled on one arm and fastened its end to the rail. It was Elise's job to sit holding this like a fisherman waiting for a bite. We had a simple code of signals arranged. Alisdair and I were pros; we didn't take chances.

The wreck looked like a hundred others I had seen. She *had* hit a mine. Twenty feet of the bows had disappeared. The grey estuary mud was half-way up her sides, but the deck was clear. The tides here are very fierce and had kept them scoured clean.

I went first to the open companionway. Slack tide is feeding time for fish, and the passageways were full of them. As I groped my way down to the galley a huge cod panicked past and whacked me with his tail. I thought of the patient beach anglers pulling in their tiddlers, and grinned.

The galley had an eerie *Marie Celeste* quality. Rusty pots were clamped in gimbals on the stoves, knives and dishes scattered in the sinks. I took a small jemmy from the bag and opened the oven of the left-hand stove. A lobster flicked out like a green shadow. I set the jemmy in the rear plate and pulled. It came out at once; the cavity behind was empty. I tried the other ovens, but I was beginning to feel that something was very wrong. I drew a blank there also.

Point two was behind an electric control panel in the steward's quarters. I didn't have to spend much time on that one. The panel swung at a touch. There was nothing behind it.

I have a photographic memory—nowadays I could do without it—and could have gone to all fifty marked points, but after the sixth blank I decided we needed a conference. I'd been down for over an hour and, even with a protective suit, that's enough in September. I couldn't feel my hands.

As I reached the *Grayson*'s deck there were three sharp tugs

on the line. Danger signal. I went up fast, the other two hauled me over the side and when I pulled the mask off I heard motors throbbing somewhere out in the fog. Conditions were hardly ideal for photography; our cover story just wouldn't do. I slipped the cables and let the tide take the *Marie*.

I gave it fifteen minutes; then put Alisdair in the bows, swinging an old-fashioned depth lead, and started engines. It was nerve-racking work. The Estuary is the worst bit of water in Europe to fiddle about in and we were completely lost.

About eleven o'clock the mist lifted suddenly. We were well clear of land and I soon picked up our position. I gave her full boost and nearly took off. I'd no idea a civilian craft could move so fast.

We lay up for the day in a creek behind Sheppey. The ebb tide left us stranded on deep black mud, a marsh stretched out round us. We could plot a revolution here and no-one would be any the wiser. Elise cooked us lunch. Her English was Girton perfect, but like everything about her the food had a faintly foreign taste. It was wonderful.

When we had eaten I said, "Look, this is night work. We have no real cover in the day. Every damn harbour police launch and idle fisherman is going to come and look at us. So, we go back at next slack water; that's at eight o'clock. We make random checks on ten more points, and if they're empty we come back here and use our brains on it. Okay?"

The others agreed. I don't know what Alisdair did with the day, but Elise and I went to bed. We reckoned we'd already wasted an aggregate of seventy-six life years without each other and we wanted to catch up.

We were back on the pitch on time. I took a chance and carried no lights, and we had one scare on the way out when a giant Shell tanker slid by us about fifty feet to port. She wasn't going fast but she didn't have to, to tramp us under. It was like looking up at the Hilton Hotel moving at seven knots.

Alisdair and I dived together. He dived just as he had always done, with utter ruthless concentration. It made him better than I could ever hope to be. It was a joy to work with him again; I felt about twenty years old. We checked ten points and drew ten blanks.

Back in the creek even Elise's cooking couldn't cheer us. Alisdair looked very worried. I said, "Look, chum, its not the end of the world—it's been fun trying. We use our brains on it and—" I hesitated— "you get more information from Garrolain."

He didn't like that at all. He muttered, "I don't know where to find him."

I said, "I think he'll find us."

He didn't until five that evening when the flow had put enough water in the creek to float us. He came in very quietly, but I heard the mutter of an engine, slipped out of the bunk and opened my suitcase. I was buckling on a shoulder holster when Elise opened her eyes. I put my finger to her lips, pulled on a jacket and went up to the saloon.

Garrolain was a surprise. Except that he was considered very dangerous, had killed with a gun and had worked for at least two sides in the battledore and shuttlecock of Intelligence, the dossier had contained no more than a list of dates and names. He was talking to Alisdair when I arrived. He was a perfectly ordinary middle-aged man, well but not smartly dressed, medium height, plain ordinary face, rather pale. A man like this could disappear in any crowd. Probably that was his value. Anyway he was Number One in this enterprise and I wanted help, not hindrance.

There were two other men in his launch and they stayed there.

He said "Garrolain" and held out his hand.

I said "Algive" and took it.

He listened to a progress report, asked a few questions and sat down. He didn't take off his raincoat although our central heating was providing its usual hothouse effect. As we talked I found myself quite liking him. I like professionals and he was one. He didn't have any of the over-dramatic characteristics that crooks and agents seem to pick up from spy novels.

I confirmed the terms. Fifty-fifty of the proceeds; cash from him after an assessment by a competent jeweller; well, Marcus would do for that.

I realise now that he hadn't the slightest intention of letting us land alive after we'd done the job, but that evening he had me fooled. His English was not quite perfect but I couldn't place the accent.

There was one difficult moment. Alisdair said, "Mr. Garrolain, we'll keep at it a few more nights and if we don't find it it won't be our fault; but do I still keep this boat? And what about the expenses?"

He looked at Alisdair for about three minutes without speaking and that's a long time in those circumstances. I was watching his eyes and they didn't blink. Then he said, "You've got to find them, Edwards."

His voice was completely flat. The *Marie* was puffing all that heat into the cabin but I shivered.

He wouldn't have a drink. On the way out he said, "I like a Smith and Wesson myself, Mr. Algive. What do you prefer?"

I said, "Water pistols," and his men helped him into the launch. Now *they* were absolutely right—pure gorilla.

Elise hadn't appeared at all. Now she came in. She had put on a black sweater and slacks and her hair was down her back. She came over and put her arms round me fiercely. It was an oddly protective gesture. I'd seen a mother do it to a child who had skipped from under a car's wheels—she clouted its ear afterwards, but they always do!

I said, "Hey! Let me go, our employer wants action."

She said, "Darling, I know where the stones must be."

She had the stage. Alisdair and I just gaped. She went on, "Suppose you had hidden them, and suppose you found out someone, never mind who, but someone was going to search for them. You were already at sea, you'd already used all the possible hiding places, what then? There would be only one place left, one place no-one would *dare* think of—*inside the bombs themselves*."

Of course she was right. She had to be. I hugged her and so did Alisdair. We sat her on the table and opened a bottle and drank her health in neat rum. She said, "Phew! You smell like Saturday night in a Portsmouth bar. Disgusting stuff."

SLACK water was just after nine and we weren't equipped for bomb defusing. I took the *Marie* out of the creek and gave an imitation of the fastest man on water. It was glorious. She tucked her stern down, lifted her bows and bellowed. To hell with secrecy. I felt like a Mediterranean playboy and Elise loved it.

Alisdair just caught a train from Sheerness. I had most of what we wanted in the flat—I suppose even retired plumbers keep their kit under the bed. He hired a car to get back but it was ten before we set out for the wreck.

I knew what I was doing. Better men than I had said leave that cargo alone, but I'd seen the bombs and I knew the type backwards—the hatches were off and I'd gone down to look on the last dive. I reasoned that whoever moved the stuff was in a hurry. He wasn't going to run all over the holds shoving in a package here and there. He'd choose one row and work along.

He would have needed to be careful and lucky but only fairly

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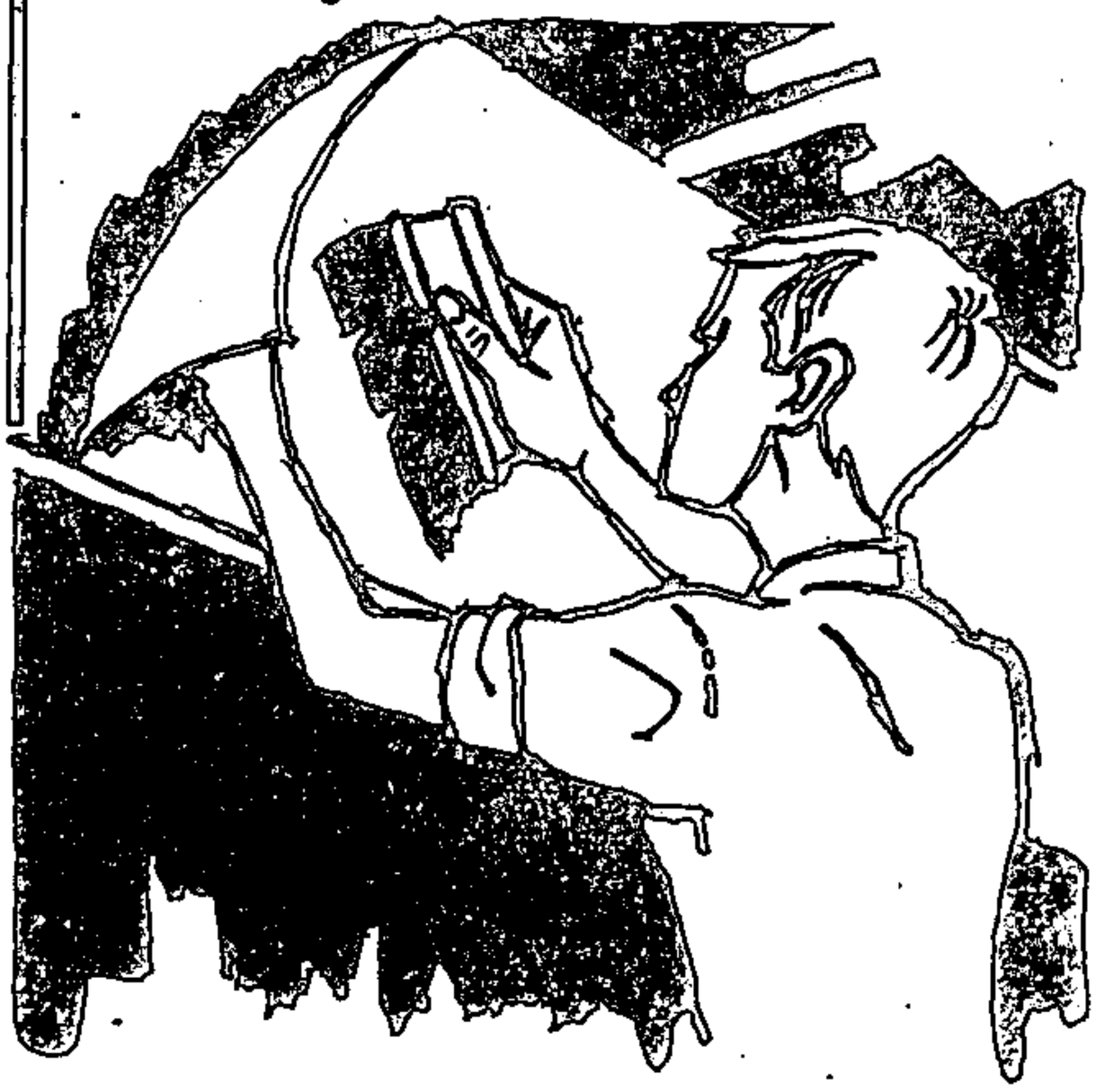

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so; at that time they were brand new and reasonably safe. In any case he would have had a loading plan which would have told him about the dangerous ones.

My troubles were going to be caused by twenty-six years of salt tides and mud swilling round them. For me they weren't just racked ammo but several thousand unexploded bombs. I proposed that we should check systematically, hold by hold, one bomb in twenty. Even then it might take days, but then again we might be lucky. We were.

There was too much tide running for my liking but we had no choice. We dived in pairs, each with a safety line, Elise and I first. If I'd lost my touch I wanted her with me when the balloon went up.

Underwater she moved as though it were her natural element. I hadn't been wrong about those legs; she *was* a dancer, she swam with the grace of a manta ray.

There are several basic rules about de-arming a bomb. I said before that I always felt as though they had brains. It's a healthy feeling because it makes you stop and think back at them, and that's the first rule. The lad who takes a spanner and fetches them a good cheerful crack is seldom able to tell you about his mistake.

We went through number one hatch and planed down to the racks. The great grey monsters were still clamped tight in their slings. I selected one at random and went over it carefully with a torch. It had identification marks that I knew, and was a simple impact mechanism. A garage hand could have fixed it. I took the big wrench from Elise and peered through her mask. She just gave her beautiful smile—you'd have thought we were pleasure-diving in the Bahamas!

The cap came off very easily and we drew a blank. The next six tries were the same. We had very little time so I decided to move to number three hold. Here we met trouble. You can't know every damned bomb made and these were new to me.

Now there are all sorts of curious fuses. Some will explode on being warmed—unusual with a big bomb, some are electro-magnetic and need special EM apparatus to defuse; some will even go up if a man's shadow falls on them. One of the most common is the trembler device. I decided that was what we had here and got busy. At least we had two chances.

I got the wrench, braced my feet against the racks and pulled. The cone wouldn't budge. I jerked at the thing until I felt sick. Then suddenly it moved. Elise had wriggled underneath the brute and added her weight.

In spite of the coldness of the water the sweat was running into my eyes and steaming up the mask—I decided I was getting old for this sort of lark.

I started to inch the cone off by hand, listening all the time in case it started ticking. What you usually have is a clock working a winding mechanism that takes a catch off the trembler, which is a simple electric switch, but with the contact balanced on a point. When the catch is off the fuse is set and you only have to topple the trembler and up she goes. The slightest move will do it. When I got the cone right off my hands were shaking. Inside was a blue packet; the fuse had gone.

Once we had found the first one it was easy. Our unknown friend had worked up the racks, not along, but I soon pinpointed the area. We had to take more risks than I fancied because of the time factor. I wanted to finish the job and get away.

As we went on I was twisting off the cones as though we were stripping a car engine. However, I still treated them with a certain respect and it was just as well I did.

Towards the end of one dive my bomb started to tick. I was diving with Alisdair and we froze for a second; then he shot instinctively upwards, bubbles pouring from his mask. I grabbed a foot and hauled him down. If this beauty was going up we had about as much chance of running as winning a swimming race against a porpoise.

Alisdair dropped down beside me and I could see him grin through his mask. The ticking was surprisingly loud. It was a time fuse, a charming device. They often went off just as rescue teams were moving in on the debris; there was no knowing the delay it was set for. I inched that cone off as gently as if I were stroking Elise's head. I knew the type well but had not, oddly enough, met them under water before.

The ticking was suddenly louder, then stopped, as the water reached the mechanism. We held our breaths for a few moments; the familiar thrill, half agony, half pleasure, hit my stomach. Alisdair was looking at his stop watch. He put up his thumbs and I earthed the terminals to the rack and went on to the next one.

THE pile of packets on the saloon table grew. Eventually the table was covered six inches deep and we could find no more. We were all utterly exhausted. Two dives—three at the most—should be the limit in one session. We had made dozens.

We all pulled off the suits and fell into chairs. I said, "Sleep here until dawn, then straight back up river," and poured drinks for us all—rum—and even Elise was glad of it.

We looked absurd in the long underwear; three Captain Webbs. I pulled a strand of Elise's hair under her nose to make a Victorian moustache. Alisdair didn't laugh. He was packing the loot into an old tin trunk.

As he was shutting the lid I said, "Well, let's see what we've been sweating for," and reached out for one of the packets.

He slammed the lid down—the sudden noise was startling—and said, "No, Simon, I don't think we had better touch anything until Garrolain sees it. He might think we were two-timing him."

He spoke rather too quickly. I said, "Okay, Al, as long as I get my share I don't mind. I've got an expensive woman to keep."

I turned to Elise. It was time she had some rest, and she was staring curiously at Alisdair. He said, "Well, you two ought to sleep tonight," and laughed.

I put my arm round his shoulders and said, "You really can dive, Al," and took Elise off.

I set my mental alarm for one hour. I was very tired, but I've always been able to wake when I want to. She was deep asleep when I opened my eyes. I touched my lips to her face, put on some trousers and a sweater and went very quietly up to the saloon. The trunk was on the floor by the table. I switched on a bulkhead light, took one of the packets and slit the waterproofing with my knife. A white powder fell on to the table. I opened four more and they were the same. It looked like fine sugar.

I thought, "Now who the devil hi-jacked that lot?" I was puzzled as to why they would go to the trouble to put it all back in the bombs.

As I was opening the fifth the main lights went on and Alisdair came down the steps. He looked at the packets and said, "Oh God!" Even then I didn't let myself see the truth. He said, "You bloody fool, Simon. Why couldn't you leave things alone?"

I suppose that made the penny drop. I licked one finger, dabbed it in the powder and cautiously touched my tongue to it. A shipmate of mine in Customs had once shown me the test. It was cocaine. There was enough in that trunk to addict half England.

I pulled the trunk over to the table and brushed the loose stuff into it. Alisdair didn't speak. I said, "Come on, man, help me

dump this filth over the side before Garrolain gets here. With luck we can keep ahead of him. If we get up to town I've some friends who will take the whole mess off our hands."

He seemed to be coming out of a long dream. He put his hand up to his head and said, "Simon, there's over a million pounds worth there and we get half."

I stared at him, and said, "You knew! Alisdair, you knew what we were diving for!"

He didn't answer. I lost my temper and shouted at him, "Good God, man, don't you realise what this is? There's enough here to rot the souls of thousands of your own people. Have you ever *seen* a junky on a mainline dose? Don't you know it's being peddled to kids nowadays? Old-fashioned white slaving is good clean fun to this!"

I grabbed the trunk and hauled it over to the steps. When I looked up Alisdair was holding a gun. It was small and very modern and I didn't like the look of it at all.

He said, "Damn you, Simon, and your preaching! I've sweated all my life to make some real money and now I've got it. Do you think I'm giving up this sort of haul because you're squeamish? Now get back to your cabin. You can stay there until Garrolain comes."

I sat on the box and played for time. I said, "How long do you think we shall live once Garrolain has his hands on that lot? He's not just a cheap crook, he's—"

Edwards' attention had wandered for a second. I took a chance and dived over the table. I got his wrist and twisted, the bone cracked and the gun fell. He didn't try to fight. I let him go and he sat limply on the floor. I said, "Al, are you all right?"

As I went to help him up he flailed with his legs and swept me off balance. I pitched over and cracked my head on the table. By the time I got to my feet he had the gun in his left hand. I remembered he was completely ambidextrous and I stood very still.

He shrieked at me, his voice high-pitched and suddenly Welsh. "You're not taking it from me. Damn you, Simon, damn you, I'll kill you!"

I looked straight down the barrel of the gun and knew he meant it.

Oddly enough, I wasn't at all scared. I just thought, "Elise my heart, what will you do?"

There was an explosion behind me and Alisdair screamed, spun round and fell. Elise stood in the doorway. She had draped a dressing-gown over her shoulders, but as I turned it slid to

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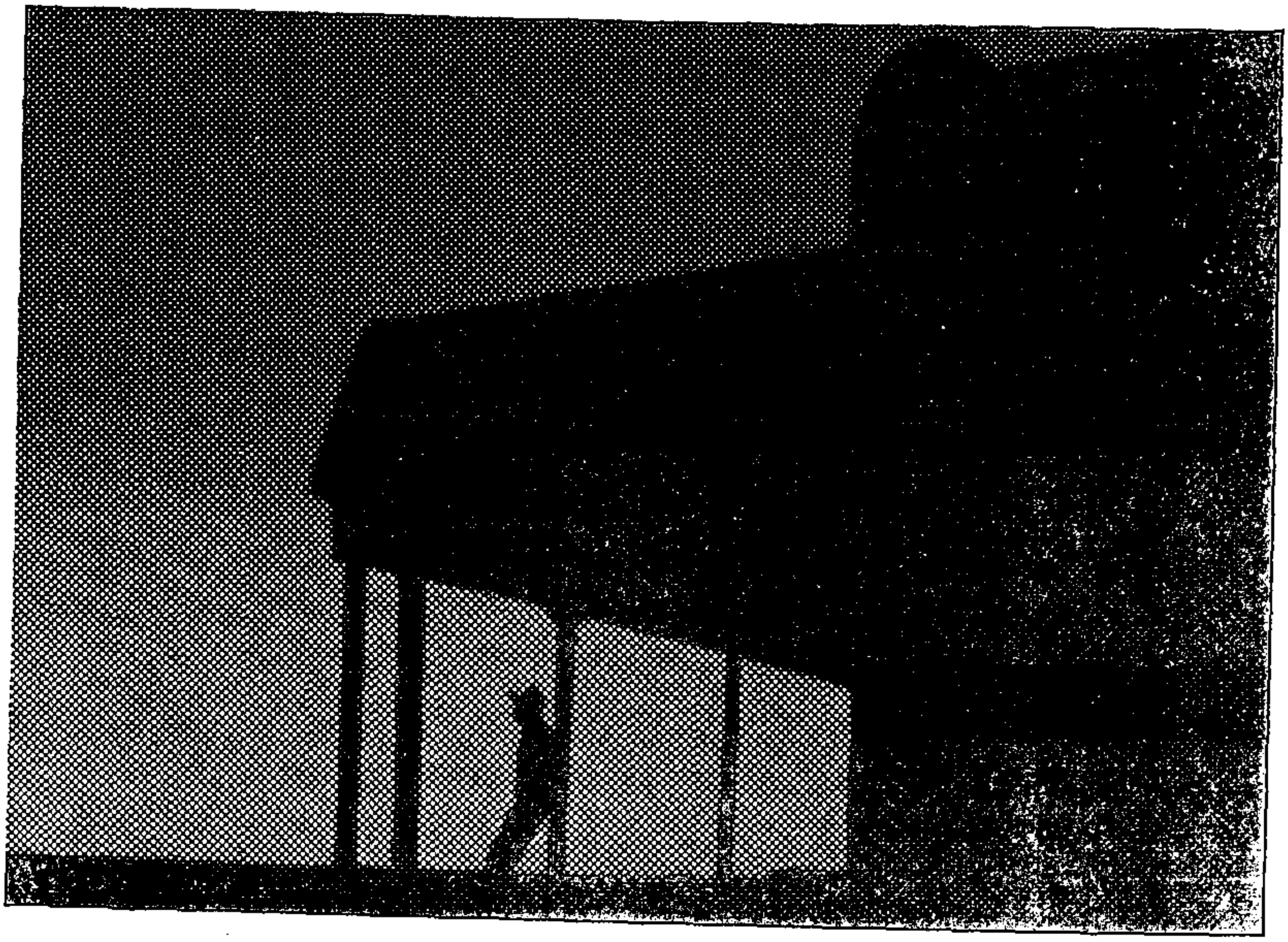

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the floor. She was holding my gun, a plain rather heavy Colt —it looked bizarre against her white skin.

Her hand was steady and Alisdair had been shot neatly through the right thigh—it seemed I had more woman than even I had suspected.

She gave me the Colt and picked up the dressing-gown. Alisdair was holding his leg and moaning. I didn't blame him. The heavy-calibre bullet must have found the bone, and he stood a very good chance of being crippled for life.

She turned to me and said, "I didn't know, I swear I didn't know! I thought it was diamonds."

I said, "Don't be silly. Of course you didn't know. Here, give me a hand with Alisdair."

She picked up Edwards' gun, put it on the table and said, "Simon, Garrolain will be here soon. I *am* mixed up in something you won't like and I want to tell you before he does. Whatever I have done was not for money—it was my duty."

I didn't answer and we got a tourniquet on Alisdair's leg, using the dressing-gown cord; then we humped the trunk up on deck. Elise started to go below to get dressed and find the first aid kit. She paused by the companionway light; her face looked so desolate that I followed her down to the cabin.

She was putting on her slacks as I went in, and turned so suddenly that she fell. I caught her, held her with one hand and pulled up the trousers with the other.

She said, "Simon, I can't marry you," and sounded as though she meant it.

I said, "Don't be silly, love, you can't even get dressed without me!"

Funny, that was one of the closest moments we had had—I felt as if we had been married for years. I think she felt it too, because she sat on the bunk and laughed rather hopelessly.

She said, "Simon, you don't give a damn *what* I am, do you? But you have got to know. I am German. East German. My family are Prussian. We are *hochgeboren*—traditional aristocracy. You'd think I would hate the regime, wouldn't you? Simon, it is still my country and I love it; but I grew up here and I love your country too. Hopeless, isn't it?"

I held her very close. She said, "I was over here with my mother when the war started—we were visiting some important English cousins. We couldn't go home but we were allowed to stay on with the family. I was only six and I didn't go home until I was eighteen, but my mother never let me forget where I belonged—or my duty to our people. When I got back, there

were no estates and no duty, but our people were still there. We lived among them in a little house in one of our old villages."

I said, "But your father . . ."

"My father had been in the old diplomatic service. He wasn't fit for active service and was more or less neutral about the Nazis. They left him alone." She saw my incredulous look. "Simon, you have no idea how isolated a great estate like ours could be then. It was like a little country on its own. After the war the new Government gave him a job. He is very clever and they needed him. He sent me back here. Simon, what's wrong with that? It's still my country!"

I ran my fingers through her hair, pulled her head back and kissed her gently, I said, "Hell, darling, we're not at war. What does it matter?"

She said eagerly, "I'm not even in Intelligence—not really in. I'm sort of unofficial consul; I arrange all sorts of things—meetings between people, trade matters—I'm very useful to both sides."

I couldn't resist saying, "And you always know what the people you introduce are up to?"

"Pretty well," she said. "Most of the time its dull diplomatic routine, but sometimes there is—"

"Garrolain!" I said.

She pulled on her shirt, walked to the door and said sharply, "Yes, Garrolain, but there are Garrolains on your side too."

I said, "Yes, I've met them. What about the dope, then?"

I didn't doubt her background then—she was *hochgeboren* all right. She snapped her head up, looked down that long straight nose and said, "I gave you my word." That was all, but I felt about five inches high.

She stopped in the doorway and went on, "I was told to contact Garrolain and give him every assistance. They had found a man in Berlin who was in the original syndicate. He was old and wanted to come over to the West. When he told them the story they let him out."

I reserved judgment on that one but did not interrupt.

She smiled mischievously. "It seemed great fun to lift the diamonds under everyone's nose. I found Alisdair for them and got him the boat—" she hesitated. "Then you came in."

"I'm still in, my girl," I said, "and in about a week you'll be out. You can send them a letter of resignation. I don't think they would approve of an honest British housewife in their ranks."

She laughed, then: "In the meantime Alisdair is bleeding

to death and Garrolain is on his way—you'd better get that trunk over the side."

She went up the ladder singing, and I slapped her bottom as she passed.

I went into the wheel-house and grabbed everything metal that would move. I even wrenched the expensive compass from its fastenings. By stamping in the packets I got a few inches of room in the trunk and packed in my old-iron assortment. Elise had gone back to Alisdair. I shut the lid and, as the *Marie* rolled to port, shoved the lot overboard.

A voice behind me said, "Now you will have to go down and get it, won't you, Mr. Algive?"

I didn't bother to turn round. I said wearily, "I didn't hear you coming. What did you do, row?"

Garrolain said, "Algive, I would advise you to do exactly what I tell you." He had his two gorillas with him and they were both armed.

I said, "Well, you're wearing a black hat—that's something. At least we know you're the villain."

I was hoping Elise might do something, I had developed a healthy respect for her as a gun-handler, but now she came quietly on deck and stood beside Garrolain. He barely looked at her.

He said, "Now why not be reasonable and bring up that box. Our bargain still holds good." He looked so solid and reliable, he might have been discussing a deal in equities. He almost convinced me.

I said, "Just who are you working for now?" If he knew Elise had talked we were in real trouble.

His voice was warm and friendly. He said, "I am in Intelligence, never mind which."

I said, "I bet I can guess!"

"No doubt you can," he answered dryly. "Our Berlin unit recently obtained information regarding this cache and naturally we wanted it; funds of this size are always useful. Now be sensible. Finish the job; I'll pay you handsomely—in cash—and you can go home and forget the whole thing."

I said, "Garrolain, I didn't give a damn when it was diamonds. I like money. But dope is different. I'm not helping to poison kids."

He said, "It will not be used in England."

I lost my temper and shouted, "Don't tell me it's going to medical research! Russian kids, German, American, what's the difference?"

He seemed bored. He lifted the gun and said, "Get on with it."

I said, "Suppose I prefer to be a hero?"

He jerked his head at Elise. "Then our mutual friend here will no doubt carry out her duty."

That was that. The tide was running at full strength and he would force her to go down. I doubted if even I could make it. I said, "You win. Let's go."

Elise helped me on with the suit. She didn't speak or give me any sign. As I went over the side I noticed the wind had risen, in another hour it would be a very nasty blow.

The tide was like a river. It took me and streamed me out like seaweed, but I hit the *Grayson*'s deck safely by number three hold. I didn't waste time looking for the box, I knew what I had to do.

The tide was stirring up a lot of silt and the lamp bounced back like a car headlight in a fog. I got over the lip of the hatch and things were a little better, but everything loose was moving in a great churning circle. I was terrified my line would foul and I'd have to cut free. Without it I hadn't a hope of getting back to the *Marie*—I'd end up miles out to sea.

Under those conditions it took me some time to find what I wanted, and as I finished working I felt the line tighten round me and they started to haul me up, not very gently. On deck the wind was up to force seven; the *Marie* was rolling heavily.

Garrolain brought his gun out and I could see he was longing to use it. I said, "Don't be a fool. The box is jammed in a grating, I can't work in this tide. We'll have to come back tomorrow night."

His dossier had said he was violent, but I've never seen a man so controlled. He said, "Pity, but I told you you were expendable," and calmly lifted the gun.

Elise spoke sharply. I speak Sussex and a little French and I didn't understand, but Garrolain did. He spoke to the gorillas —they were English enough—"Put him down by the engines and smash the bottom in—right?" They hauled me away.

Elise said in English, "I will go down for the box later." She didn't look at me.

The *Sea Marie*'s engine room was ten feet square by five high and was very full of engine. There didn't seem much between you and the sea down there. I could hear the mounting swell beating in her sides. There was the usual fire equipment on the bulkhead, including a large axe. Garrolain's pets were big men

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but it took them ten minutes to knock a hole in her side. When the Estuary was coming in nicely, they went up the ladder and bolted the hatch after them. I didn't try anything heroic; the one not playing fireman had both guns and I didn't see how he could miss at that range.

There was another smaller hatch forward. I knew it was clipped down and padlocked from the outside but it was not such a tough proposition as the main one. It took quite an effort to make myself strip off the suit. The water was swirling in through the ripped plates and I felt naked without it. However, I'd never get through the hatch with the cylinders on, so I ditched the lot. It had been a nice touch, shutting me below with full equipment. I could have lived for two hours under water—plenty of time to think.

I got my shoulders against the hatch and braced my feet. After five minutes I knew I couldn't do it. I checked the gash in the side to see if it could be enlarged; there was three feet of water in her now and I could do nothing with bare hands. I had a choice of putting on the suit and prolonging it or attending the first house. I sat on the forward engine cover and waited.

A voice called urgently, "Simon, keep away from the hatch." There was a burst of automatic fire and the cover lifted. I lunged up the ladder and sprawled beside Elise on the deck. She put an arm round me and hauled me upright. There was a flash from the other boat and something slammed into my left shoulder and knocked me flat again. It didn't hurt; I just couldn't move my arm.

Then the whole scene lit up. They'd turned a small searchlight on us. It wasn't the time or place for dalliance, but I just sat and looked at her. She had stripped to her underwear to swim over to me. She must have made it with one arm out of the water, because she was cradling an automatic rifle in her arms and trying to shoot out the light. Her head was back and her teeth bared, the long hair streamed out behind her in the rising wind. She looked like a twentieth-century Valkyrie.

Everything happened at once. She got the light, and as she did so I saw her spin round and fall. The boats smashed together and two men boarded us. They had switched on their navigation lights and I could see that neither was Garrolain.

The fools had left me my suit knife and I had brought it up with me. They ignored me, picked up Elise, and swung her towards their craft. I got to my knees, felt for the nearest back, and drove the knife in. He fell between the boats and took it with him.

Elise dropped across me. The second man stopped, pulled her up and swung his boot into my face. I remember the taste of blood and tar—curious how things like that stick in your brain—then I felt Elise's gun under my hand and fired into him. From that range the impact knocked him back on to his own deck.

I must have been slightly mad by then because I kept firing until the magazine was empty. His body was driven back by the shells over the wet deck until he finished up in the far gunnels.

As I turned back towards Elise, she got to her feet, flung herself at me and clung like a leech. Then I saw Garrolain. He had come aboard aft and was walking down that reeling deck as surely as if it were solid rock. He shouted above the scream of the wind. I couldn't understand a word, but Elise did and clung tighter. I saw that he had a gun and tried to fling her away. She went down with me on top and I braced myself as he lifted his arm. I thought, "It's bloody silly to die like this in peacetime."

Then, incredibly, he stopped, dropped the gun and clutched at his throat. Alisdair had risen like a shadow from the main hatch. His long fingers wrapped round Garrolain's neck; his head was jammed over the man's shoulder; the pair of them looked like something from a Breugel hell. Alisdair was shrieking, "You left me to drown! You bastard, you left me to drown!"

I shall never understand how he got up the companionway. He couldn't possibly have stood on that leg. His whole weight now hung on those clenched fingers. You can't mistake the sound of a bone snapping, and even above the sea noises and shouting, I heard Garrolain's neck go.

Alisdair stood like a stork balancing on his good leg and looked first at his hands and then at the body. Then he said quite calmly, "Skipper, there's two more aboard there—I'll get them," and flung himself into the other boat. I can't tell you why, but I'm certain he thought we were back in the war.

I was about to jump after him when someone got their engine going and they shot away from us. I heard them crash into the derrick of the wreck as the *Sea Marie* slid down under us.

I put my good arm under Elise and kicked backwards out of the suction. I hoped to run into one of the masts of the *Grayson* but the tide took us and swept us past. I realised we were done for, there was no swimming back against that race.

Elise spoke. She said, "Simon, are you all right? I saw them hit you."

I said, "Keep still." Then, "You're the nicest spy I've ever loved."

The swell was really big and in the troughs the wind did not

get at us. I could hear her perfectly; she said, "How many fuses did you set, darling?"

I said, "Three."

The sky was clearing a bit and I could see some stars. As we went up the side of a swell I thought I saw the wreck's masts against the horizon; if I did we were a long way from her and travelling fast.

Elise was very quiet, letting me support her completely. I panicked and shouted at her, "Darling, are you all right?"

She said, "Yes, Simon," then, "I think they are caught up in the wreck. Shall we be far enough away?" Her voice was sleepy as though we had woken in the night, her head on my chest. I was starting to feel very odd. Perhaps we were in bed; I certainly felt warmer. It was beautifully warm and Elise was curled round me . . .

I saw the glare as we grounded on a mudbank. It seemed as though the whole Eastern horizon was on fire. The sound came next and seemed to go on for an hour. I have been near a good many explosions but this was fantastic; it went on until the whole world was noise. I dragged Elise up out of the water and lay on her. The shock wave slammed over us and the sea boiled at our feet. The sound mumbled shorewards and the glare died.

She stirred a little. I thought, "I must keep her warm."

She said, "Simon, I'm *not* a spy; I'm a diplomat." She gave a funny little laugh. "Simon, I played hockey for Cheltenham. You couldn't play hockey for Cheltenham and be a spy, could you, darling?" Then, "Simon, love me well."

I held her and said, "Darling, darling, don't worry, everything's right now, I love you for ever."

She said, "Good-bye, Simon."

I was holding her close to me and I knew she was gone. She made no more fuss about dying than she had about loving and living.

The harbour police picked us up about dawn. I came to a little in the launch but I wouldn't let them take her from me. The sea was covered with dead fish as far out as I could see. They took her from me to get her ashore and I could see the print of my hand on her shoulder where I had gripped her. Every window in the town was broken; it was like war-time.

I stayed on my feet. They wanted to put me to bed, but I wouldn't leave her. The doctors at the hospital treated my shoulder as I sat by her.

Some time during the day Richard Martin came down and

must have fixed things, because no-one bothered me. I didn't speak to him. Later, I wrote the whole thing down for Martin and the police.

I buried her with my family, the emerald still on her hand. I had thought there might be trouble, but no-one else claimed her. Then I went back to the Oil Rig. What else was there to do? It was just eleven days since Alisdair had walked into the pub.

© Alan Dipper 1967

☐ ABOUT THE AUTHOR. Alan Dipper was born in the Isle of Sheppey, in 1922. All the family on his mother's side were deep-water sailors or longshoremen. This may account for the fact that he spent fifteen years farming near a point that claims to be the farthest from the sea in England. After leaving school he won a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art; then, while waiting to join the RAF, he worked in repertory.

After demobilisation he went back to the stage for a year, but it all seemed rather an odd way to earn a living, particularly as all his RADA contemporaries seemed to be rocket-propelled towards the Top. Moreover he had married, and thought it would be a good idea to eat regularly. He now went to live in Warwickshire at Welford, his wife's home, and while carrying spears at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, arranged for training as a farmer. He then bought a farm near Edgehill, and through various vicissitudes remained there for fifteen years.

Dipper now lives in Sussex with five children aged eight to eighteen, a wife, 3,000 hens, two ponies, a dog called Fred and a three-legged cat. He works in London as a partner in the oldest window, office and house cleaning company in the Royal Borough.

He has always been, like Kai Lung, a "fabricator of imagined events", but, until six months ago, entirely for his own and his friends' amusement. On the one hot night we had last June, a writer friend dared him, after an excellent dinner, to send in a story for publication. He submitted five, and four were bought at once. Tides of Conflict **is his most ambitious story so far, and will be the basis of a novel.**

Blondes, Brunettes or Redheads?

SOLUTION OF THE PUZZLE ON PAGE 102

1. Since those who liked redheads are included among those liking blondes, and since there were only 3 who didn't care for blondes, the total number must have been 25.

2. As 7 voted "blondes only", and 6 liked redheads, the balance of the 22 blonde-admirers must consist of 9 who liked both blondes and brunettes. 16 like brunettes, and 3 of these liked brunettes only. Taking 9+3 from 16, we are left with 4 who liked all three types.

PENS AND PETTICOATS

BOOK REVIEWS

by
Wallace
Reyburn

CONFRONTED with new novels by women, I cannot help but feel that the time is ripe to give some sure-fire tips to those ambitious to know How To Become A Woman Novelist.

1. *The Heroine's Name.* It is terribly important to give your heroine a good name, preferably so unusual that it requires explanation which, if you really apply yourself, can use up the first page and a half of the novel. Something such as the fact that when her mother was carrying her she had read *The Heroes of Norseland* and had been so taken with the book that when our girl was born she named her Norsia. You can spin this out by explaining that she hated her name at first but then realised its advantages when people she met always exclaimed "What an unusual name!" and this made her something apart from ordinary girls.

So, having launched Norsia Farringdon into the world (give her a good, high-sounding three-syllable surname), you then put in lots of stuff about her growing-up problems. In particular—

2. *The Arrival of Womanhood.* A good way to do this is in the school changing-room, where the other girls say, "Look at Norsia!" As with her name, she is self-conscious about this at first. (Put in stuff about her trying to camouflage her expanding silhouette—standing in front of a full length mirror reviewing the situation is a good thing.) But then comes the time when she says what-the-hell, boys seem to *notice*.

3. *Dresses.* Miss no opportunity to describe in detail the clothes she wears, using all sorts of terms such as flared skirt, embossed georgette, filigree lace, ruching, tight-fitting bodice and floral

tulle. And don't forget to have a scene in which Norsia goes through unutterable torment about a party dress which she feels is going to make her look terribly dowdy at a formal dance. This is a winner.

4. *Flowers.* Describe these till the cows come home. Don't be like a male writer and say "She walked through the garden to the river" and then get on with the story. Say instead, "She walked along the gravel path fringed by herbaceous borders, azaleas, antirrhinum, lobelia, larkspur, hyacinths, love-in-a-mist and the sweet-smelling saxifraga."

5. *Men's Names.* Always make these high-sounding, like Sebastian Lovegrove, Gaylord Kirkland, Peregrine Cavendish. And make sure there are plenty of references to "his beautiful back". All heroes in women's novels have beautiful backs, although it is not known precisely why it is this part of a man that women invariably single out for praise.

6. *Dawns and Sunsets.* Give lengthy descriptions of these. In fact it is a very good idea to start your novel off with a sunrise. Something on these lines: "The steely fingers of dawn were entwining themselves in the quaint cobbled streets and old-world fishermen's cottages of Driftwood-on-Sea when Norsia awoke." Describe in detail the sinking of the sun in the western sky as though you were the only person in the world who had ever seen a sunset. Dwell on it. Remember that you have 224 pages to fill and probably nothing much else to say.

7. *The Sex Bit.* This is tricky because, being a woman, you are terribly conscious that if you go into too much detail you are going to reveal that you're a bit naïve about sex. So bring on the old asterisks. These are a great help. Like this, for instance:

> "Lying under the iridescent laburnum, amidst spring's earliest hint of wild flowers, Norsia could feel Eliot's hot breath on her cheek. This was it, she knew it within herself. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, his lips drew closer to hers . . .
>
> * * *
>
> Next morning Norsia was up with the larks and her heart was singing as lustily as they."

That gets around the whole problem.

8. *The Summarising Paragraph.* This final paragraph is the most important in the book. It rounds the whole thing off. It lets the reader know that, despite everything, there is Hope.

Your pay-off paragraph should start with a recap of the mess Norsia is in. She's pregnant by a married man. Her mother is

dying. She has just learned that her favourite brother was killed instantly when he fell down an open manhole in Aden.

Then comes the clincher at the end: "But as she turned away from the window aglow with the myriad hues of sunset to stir the baked beans, an inward smile, a sort of radiance suffused her face. *She knew everything was going to be all right.*"

☐ **FOLLOWING THE FORMULA.** Take this new novel by Margaret Drabble, a woman novelist of whom it may rightfully be said that she is *acclaimed*.

The plot of *Jerusalem the Golden* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 21s.) can be summed up in one sentence: Clara comes to London University from the North, is kissed by a married man in a kitchen and has an encounter with him on his office floor after hours; is then kissed by his brother in another kitchen and finally goes back to the married man. That is the entire substance of the story and in retailing it Miss Drabble conforms magnificently to the rules of How To Be A Woman Novelist.

The first page is devoted to explaining her heroine's name and for good measure her best friend is called Cleila. The two main males have high-sounding names—Gabriel and Magnus Denham.

The Bosom Bit is there, and when our Clara "developed young, to the astonishment of her contemporaries" she found that her "possession of big breasts" caused her to be accepted into the smartest clique at school when formerly they had ignored her. "She was gratified by this change of front," writes Miss Drabble, which is a neat turn of phrase but I am sure quite unintentional because nowhere else in the book does she give any evidence of having a sense of humour.

Plenty of clothes are described—grey chenille, unlined skirt, blue-flowered patterned material, crochet-collared dress, Thai silk, taffeta—and Clara is frightfully embarrassed (for three pages) when she has to wear a handed-on party dress to a school dance. She has a walk through the laurels, laburnums, daffodils and herbaceous borders. She is fascinated by the back of Gabriel's neck. And there is the good old Summarising Paragraph, with its tagline of Hope: "She would survive because she had willed herself to survive."

About the only cliché of women's fiction that Miss Drabble doesn't resort to is the glossing over of sex with those useful asterisks. Perhaps it would have been better if she had. Instead she goes in, boots and all, and in an obvious endeavour to be "modern" and bold she merely winds up unspeakably trite and

prosaic. Finale of Kiss No. 1 in the kitchen ("the lofty classic height of passion") is: "He took her hand, lifted it up, and kissed it, on the palm and on the fingers, and said: 'I'll carry the tray, if you take the packet of digestive biscuits.'" Really, Miss Drabble.

Miss Drabble will, it is to be hoped, look back on these novels of her nonage with as much embarrassment as she remembers her handed-on party frock. She will realise that their faults are the faults of youth (she is still in her twenties). The things of which she writes are so fresh in her mind that she does not stand off from them and see that they are (a) things women novelists have been flogging for years; or (b) topics which women (or men) are not interested in reading about in fiction. She, like Clara, came from the provinces (Sheffield), up to university (Cambridge), and when she switches from being so subjective, starts to observe people around her and writes objectively about them, then she will begin to put on some real mileage on her journey towards literary fame.

☐ **RETURN TO ROMANCE.** I found *The Interloper*, by Mary Howard (Collins, 18s.), more readable than the Drabble. Mary Howard is supposed to be "a Romance writer", but she is definitely a cut above the other romantic girls. And in this story, which centres on an advertising agency and its promotion campaign for a new man-made fibre, she is at least seeking to be contemporary, compared to the old-fashioned structure and content of the Drabble offering.

☐ **EVER GREENE.** Graham Greene's new collection of short stories, *May We Borrow Your Husband* (The Bodley Head, 21s.), is subtitled *And Other Comedies of the Sexual Life*. The lead story and several others *are* concerned with the sexual life. But I think it is stretching things a bit to say the same of a story about a boy who loses his father when a pig falls on him from the balcony of an Italian tenement, and another about a man who has private drinking sessions with his cronies and is suspected of plotting anarchy.

However, whether or not you are enticed in by the subtitle, there is good reading here. *May We Borrow Your Husband* is a typical wry Greene piece; *Mortmain*, about the ex-wife who plants disconcerting notes in the flat of her ex-husband for his new wife to find, you may have read when it appeared in Argosy. No Somerset Maugham in the field of the short story, Greene nevertheless does evoke mood and characters that stay

in the reader's mind, which after all is the object of writing.

☐ **THE TRAGEDY OF YAKOV BOK.** One does not have to be Jewish to appreciate *The Fixer*, by Bernard Malamud (Eyre and Spottiswoode, 30s.). But if one is, then I am sure there is much more to be got out of it because of the abundance of expressions and rituals familiar to those who are of that faith. It is the story of Jewish persecution in Russia early this century, told through the plight of one person, a Jewish odd-job man accused of the ritual murder of a twelve-year-old boy. Malamud is an extremely good story-teller. (The novel is already a success in America and shortly to be filmed.) He captures your interest from the first page and makes you impatient with any interruption that causes you to break off from reading. The story of the rigging of evidence against the innocent Yakov Bok because he is Jewish, and his brutal treatment both by his gaolers and fellow prisoners for the same reason, is told with such vivid simplicity as to be frightening. The broader aspect, with its echoes in Nazi Germany and elsewhere, is brought home all the more forcibly by the detailed suffering of this one man.

☐ **A LONG TRIAL.** In his best known novel, the very funny *Don't Go Near the Water*, William Brinkley drew on wartime experiences in the Pacific. Here, in *The Ninety and Nine* (Peter Davies, 35s.), he makes use of his naval exploits in the Mediterranean. The ninety and nine are the crew of an LST (Landing Ship, Tank), ferrying tanks, trucks, troops and supplies from Naples to Anzio.

Those who served in and around Italy will find much here that is familiar—vintage vino guaranteed not to be sold until at least an hour old; Neapolitan urchins offering introductions to their sisters; army hospital nurses with high and mighty ideas of themselves when off duty because of short supply and big demand. One character has BOMB DISPOSAL emblazoned on his Jeep, which gets him wherever he wants to go without question —including the out-of-bounds parts of Naples. It became quite a vogue in Italy to have something painted on your Jeep. Many of the troops Christened them after their Italian girl friends. When the break-through was made and we started up into Europe proper I recall seeing one Jeep labelled BREST OR BUST.

A great deal of the novel is anecdotal, but the main thread of the plot concerns the birth, on the LST, of a baby to an Italian girl being evacuated from Anzio. One of the LST crew

befriends her when she is trying to rear the baby in the slums of Naples and takes her Navy food, cigarettes and soap, which she flogs on the black market. When he is caught there is a long court martial (fifty pages of it) in which he argues that he felt the Navy owed something to the child because it was born in one of their ships.

I didn't think this novel was as powerful as the *Caine Mutiny* court martial, to the point of being much ado about little, but of course Brinkley is a light rather than a searching war novelist.

☐ **FRENZY AND FURY.** *A Time Too Soon*, by Edward Lindall (Heinemann, 21s.), is pretty raw stuff. The setting is New Guinea just prior to independence, and a small contingent of Australian officials and technicians are in control of a group of up-country villages in the interim period before the hand-over. The bulk of the white population having departed, the natives are impatient to have control in their own hands, and the discovery in one of the villages of a boy whom they feel is *their* Messiah makes them eager to take action. They are whipped up to such a frenzy that they set about slaughtering the white men and raping their wives.

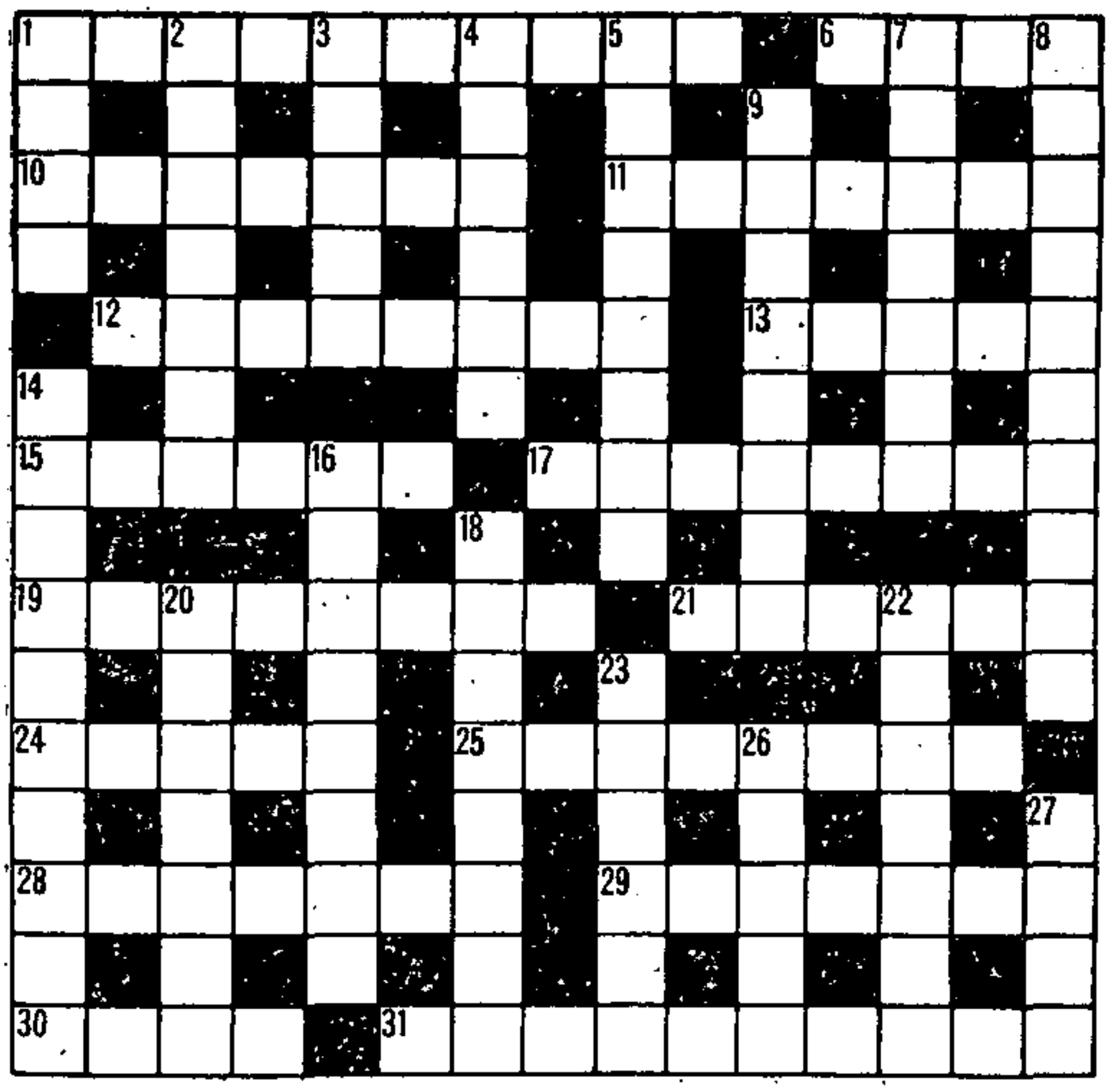
This novel is, sad to say, a story of our times, as authentic as the news headlines.

☐ **BRIEF REVIEWS.** More Argosy writers are in the book list this month. Alan Scholefield has *Great Elephant* (Heinemann, 25s.), a very well researched historical novel set in the Zululand of last century. W. H. Boore weighs in with *Cry on the Wind* (Collins, 15s.) which, by way of drastic contrast, is set in the Wales of today. I'm afraid I got bogged down early amid the Blodwens and the Joneses, but it did start me wondering: what happened to The Welsh Novel? We know all about the regional novels of England, Scottish novels, Irish novels . . . why is there no tradition of Welsh novels? From Winston Graham, whose many stories in Argosy have made him a favourite with readers of the magazine, comes a new novel, *The Walking Stick* (Collin, 25s.). This is the story of Deborah Dainton, a crippled girl in her twenties, who, having fallen in love with a man for the first time, is persuaded by him to co-operate in a sinister scheme to rob an antique shop.

As in his previous novels, Graham traces his characters' development with consummate skill, and weaves a plot that makes compelling reading.

ARGOSY CROSSWORD

Solution next month



ACROSS

1 Arrives after a bath and confesses all! (5, 5).

6 Capital solo arrangement (4).

10 Indicating a chore for the teacher? (7).

11 Anguish caused by putting men in wrong (7).

12 Straight alternative required when making a film (8).

13 Backfires at the end of a printed letter (5).

15 Where the cobbler works in the end? (2, 4).

17 A fish to wallow in the mud (8).

19 I don't know what the bidder said at the auction! (3, 3, 2).

21 Suit to change into? (6).

24 It turned scarlet, not fresh (5).

25 Politicians that are right about high-explosive speculations! (8).

28 No realm for the medico-social worker (7).

29 Brief verdict on one who is late (7).

30 Get near, somehow (4).

31 A friend of sport? (10).

DOWN

1 The Commanding Officer wants me not to go! (4).

2 Alarm! It could be rendered warlike (7).

3 Be à star performer? (5).

4 "Where the spent —— quiver and gleam" (Arnold) (6).

5 Wanting the lot, apparently, in spite of what has happened (5, 3).

7 She takes a revolutionary cut! (7).

8 Not working in the wrong position? (3, 2, 5).

9 Constraint needed for barometrical operation (8).

14 He's authorised to try different target aims (10).

16 Doing the work of a plumber, maybe (8).

18 The coastal region sounds unmetaphorical (8).

20 In the old days a skilled one could make a good bit (7).

22 Assumed by the worker in supreme command? (7).

23 Just depend on me! (6).

26 Europe's busiest stream of traffic (5).

27 Could be what comes at the end of winter (4).

Published each month by FLEETWAY PUBLICATIONS LTD., FLEETWAY HOUSE, FARRINGDON STREET, LONDON, E.C.4, and printed in England by HAZELL, WATSON & VINEY LTD., AYLESBURY. Subscription Rates: £2 12s. for 12 months, £1 6s. for 6 months. Sole Agents: Australia and New Zealand, GORDON & GOTCH LTD.; South Africa, CENTRAL NEWS AGENCY LTD.; Rhodesia, Zambia and Malawi, KINGSTONS LTD. ARGOSY is sold subject to the following conditions, namely, that it shall not, without the written consent of the publishers first given, be lent, resold, or hired out, or otherwise disposed of by way of Trade, except at the full retail price as shown on the cover; and that it shall not be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise disposed of in a mutilated condition or in any unauthorised cover by way of Trade; or affixed to or as part of any publication or advertising, literary or pictorial matter whatsoever

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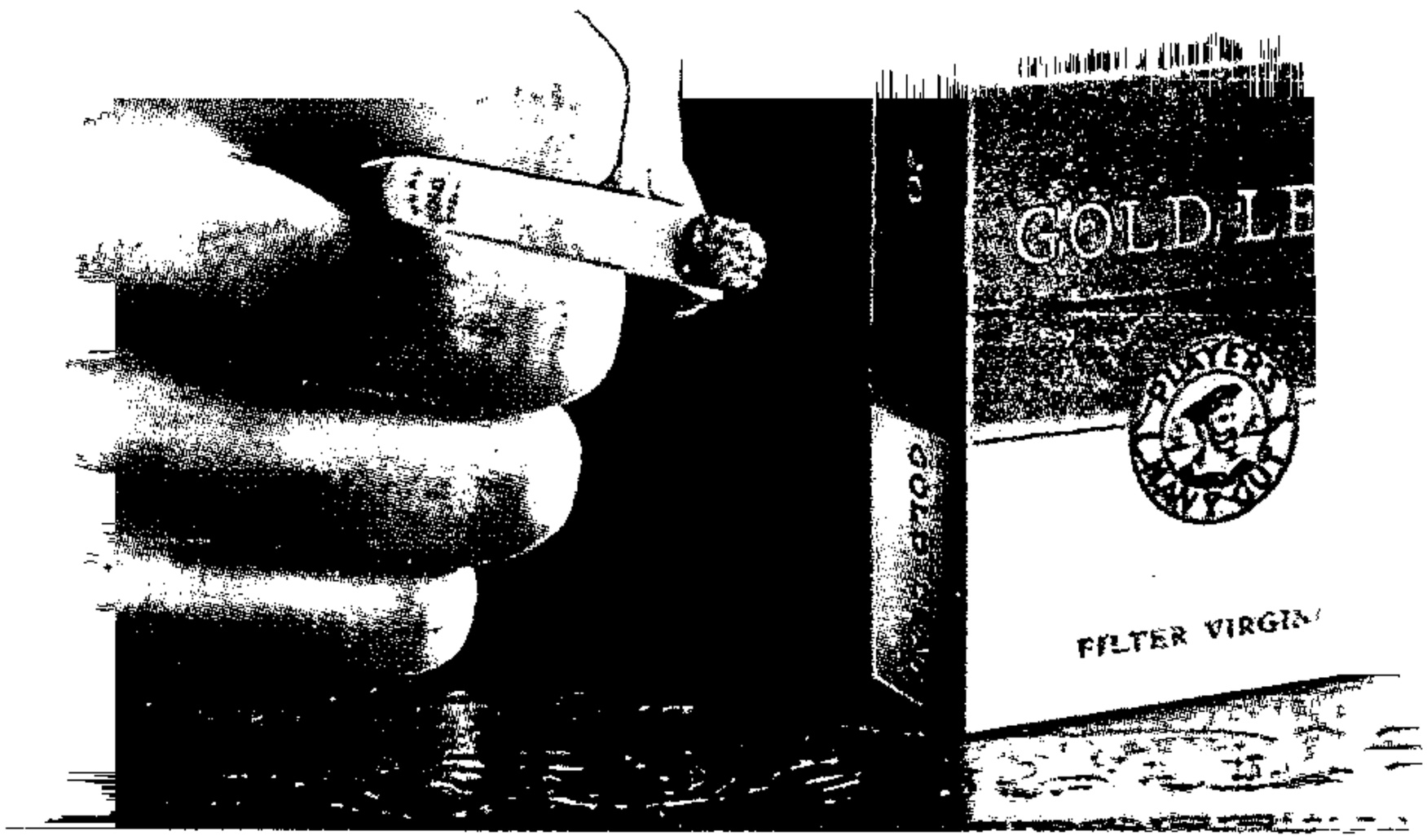

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